2 - Trial of Wisdom

I led everyone outside.

Of course, there was a reason for bringing them all out like this.

The Dungeon of Wisdom only rewards experience and a significant boost to your base stats… your talent, in other words.

And since there's no limit to the number of people who can enter, it's best to bring as many people as possible.

There's no guarantee that the Hero party will gain more members here, so I'm bringing them along to help them grow faster.

'He must be pretty bummed out.'

Since time doesn't flow inside the dungeon anyway, there's no point in going later.

He seemed to understand that I wanted to go ahead of time in case we ran out of time later.

However…

"…"

"It's a shame, but what can we do… Aria hasn't said anything wrong."

"That's true, but I can't help but feel disappointed."

Everyone couldn't hide their disappointment.

Well, I understand why Stella is sulking like that.

It's practically the first time in her life that she's come to hang out with friends, but she hasn't even had a chance to properly enjoy it before being told to go through a Trial…

She probably knows in her heart that this is the right thing to do, but she can't help but feel bad.

“[We’ll be out soon. Don’t be too disappointed.]”

“Ugh…”

I told them not to be too disappointed, but since I don't know what kind of Trial the dungeon will present, it seems difficult for them to accept it positively.

If I say any more, they might start to suspect me, so I can't say anything further.

“Then we’ll have plenty of fun when this is over, right?”

“[Of course.]”

“Then that’s good enough.”

What is this, trying to appease a child…

I chuckled inwardly.

“By the way, how do we get to the Dungeon of Wisdom?”

Evan turned to me, looking curious, and asked.

That’s right…

I could tell them that much in advance.

“[As far as I know, it’s definitely…]”

We've arrived just in time, so I can tell them here.

I turned my head and looked towards the sea.

The three of them turned their heads, following my gaze, and wore dumbfounded expressions.

“Um… Aria?”

“[Yes?]”

“You do know that you’re looking at the sea, right?”

Of course, I do.

“[Yes, that’s right. It’s in the sea.]”

“…It looks dangerous no matter how you look at it…?”

That’s right.

If an ordinary person were to enter, they would immediately be swept away by the strong currents and brutally killed by being slammed against everything.

But that immense current is only there to prevent ordinary people from entering.

“[Evan, could you infuse the Holy Sword with a lot of Holy Power and throw it into the very center of that whirlpool?]”

“Uh… this?”

- Wait, hold on! Are you abandoning me?

Estel's almost screaming voice rang out when I told him to throw the Holy Sword right into the center of the whirlpool.

It's unfortunate, but there's no other way to enter the dungeon.

Well, there were other ways in the game.

The problem is that they only involved using bugs or using the engine to move the character's coordinates to enter.

This is reality, so if you were to push through with overwhelming force, it might be possible, but there's no guarantee that you'd be able to reach the dungeon that way.

The space might be distorted, and you might end up in a strange place.

It's best to enter this kind of place using the proper method.

“[Don’t worry, you can get the Holy Sword back once the path opens.]”

“Ugh…”

- Hey, Evan… you’re not really going to throw me in there, are you?! I’m a girl, you can’t just throw me away!!!

“Sorry, Estel.”

Evan seemed to hesitate for a moment after hearing my words, but without hesitation, he channeled mana into the Holy Sword and threw it into the whirlpool.

I could hear Estel's voice cursing us, but it must have been my imagination.

Splash!

After being thrown into the whirlpool, about 30 seconds passed.

The swirling waves gradually began to calm down.

“Oh…”

“The waves…!”

As the waves gradually subsided, the sea slowly parted on both sides, and a path began to appear.

A path leading into the sea.

“A path… has opened…”

“[Let’s go in.]”

Let’s go inside for now.

At my words, the three of them nodded and moved forward as if possessed.

As we descended the stairs, the path that had opened closed again, turning back into an ordinary beach.

Soon, the calm waves began to swirl again.

- How could you do that, Evan! You’re so mean, so mean, so mean!!

“S-Sorry… I won’t do it again…”

Evan took out the Holy Sword, which was stuck right next to him, as soon as he entered.

As soon as he held it in his hand, Estel's voice, which hadn't been heard until now, struck his mind.

'How noisy...'

Seriously.

Due to the nature of communicating through Thought-form, I, who can detect Thought-form and understand words, have no choice but to listen to all of Estel's complaints.

Well, considering that she was suddenly thrown into a whirlpool, it's not strange for an Ego Sword and a sentient being to react like that, but I can't help but think it's noisy.

We're going to be separated again once we go inside anyway.

The Trial of Wisdom, as the name suggests, doesn't involve doing anything with force, so the Holy Sword isn't needed.

No, it's more accurate to say that weapons themselves are not needed.

- Don’t abandon me next time…

'I wasn't exactly abandoning you, though.'

It could be felt that way depending on how you take it.

Above all, it's not my Holy Sword, it's Evan's Holy Sword, so there's no element for me to interfere with.

“Wow…”

“Is this… really inside the sea?”

Everyone looked around with amazed expressions as they walked through the intangible passage.

The scenery here would feel very beautiful to the people of this era.

Even in modern times, it's rare to see such a sight, so how much more amazing would it be for the people of this world?

To explain it in modern terms, it would be like looking at the sea inside a tunnel made of transparent glass.

Since they're walking through that, it's no wonder they're reacting like that.

'It looks the same to me, though...'

I can't detect the transparency of objects with this…

I can only sense the existence of the passage and the fish swimming beyond it, as usual, which is a shame.

As we walked through the passage, we arrived at…

“This is… the dungeon?”

“It looks so strange…”

“…”

Uriel and Stella were looking at it with amazed expressions, probably because it was their first time seeing it, and Evan swallowed nervously, looking tense as it looked almost exactly like the dungeon he had entered last time.

“[Shall we go inside for now?]”

Since our qualifications had already been proven above, the dungeon door opened as soon as we arrived.

Everyone watched the door open automatically without us doing anything with amazed expressions, and at the same time, they began to feel nervous at the thought that they were really inside the dungeon now.

Amidst the tension, we stepped into the dungeon.

While walking through the dark entrance, blue flames rose up and spread as if telling us to follow them.

Following the path indicated by the flames, we arrived at a narrow plaza.

“This is…”

“Didn’t you say it was a dungeon? It doesn’t look like a dungeon…”

- Have you come to receive the Trial of Wisdom?

Everyone looked around in confusion at the voice that seemed to be echoing in their heads.

However, the voice continued to speak, unconcerned.

- I will test your wisdom.

“What exactly do you mean by testing our wisdom…?”

Evan asked, but the voice didn't answer.

It only said some flattering words, hoping that we would successfully overcome the Trial that was about to come.

- Then… let us begin.

Immediately after the voice said that,

Rumble

The ground began to shake slightly.

“Wh-What…!”

“It’s dangerous…!”

“The ground…!!”

The ground of the entire place, which had seemed like a narrow plaza, collapsed and dropped us just as Stella rushed to grab us.

“Kyaaaa!”

“Uwaaa!”

A somewhat… familiar fall…

I feel like I fell like this recently.

I continued to have meaningless thoughts inwardly and waited for the Trial of Wisdom to come.

The further we fell, the more my consciousness gradually faded.

I entrusted myself to my fading consciousness and closed my eyes.

3 - Trial of Wisdom

“… Ummm…?”

Was I asleep…?

With sleepy eyes, I looked up at the ceiling and then stirred, getting out of bed.

“I have to go to school…”

I have to hurry and get ready for school.

Opening my eyes, I got out of bed with familiar movements and started preparing to go to school…

…

…

‘What…’

Something feels off.

I don’t know anything about the word ‘school,’ but why am I acting so naturally?

“School… what…”

What even is that school in the first place?

The moment I had that question,

“Kuh…”

A sharp headache struck, and strange memories flooded my mind.

It was as if someone was telling me how I had to act.

Yet, it stirred up my mind, making me feel a strange sense of incongruity.

I clutched my head and gasped for breath.

“What… what’s going on…”

What is going on?

No, in the first place…

‘Where the hell am I…?’

The moment that question arose, it was as if the fog that had filled my head…

I need to find out where this is right now.

Sweating, I walked towards the window as if possessed.

And the moment I looked outside the window, I froze.

Even though it was a landscape I had never seen before in my life, for some reason, it felt very familiar to me.

“Where is this…?”

My original memories were slowly returning.

Just until recently, I had entered the dungeon to receive the Trial, and right after hearing that the Trial was starting, the floor opened and I fell below.

And when I woke up, I was here.

‘Is this… the place where I receive the Trial?’

But something felt very strange.

Tall buildings that seemed to be made of iron stood in rows, and below them, countless iron lumps were moving around the streets.

I was seeing these things for the first time, yet for some reason, I knew their names.

They were a type of transportation called cars.

‘Cars? School? What is all this…?’

More than that, what is the identity of these memories, and what is all this unknown knowledge?

Perhaps it was because I was so confused, but for some reason, I felt an anxiety that I couldn’t just stay still.

It was then.

Beep beep! Beep beep!

“Wh-what?”

Startled by the strange sound coming from right behind me, I reflexively turned around. There, was a small, rectangular object.

It was a shape I had never seen before in my life.

But that object, too, felt very familiar to me for some reason.

It was something called a smartphone.

With familiar steps, I approached and looked at the smartphone screen.

The notification window read ‘School Day.’

‘Go to school?’

Everything written here was full of things I couldn’t understand.

‘If this is a Trial…’

I had no idea what kind of Trial it was, but if it was a Trial, I had to overcome it.

I didn’t know where this was, but one thing was certain: only a Trial could explain the current situation.

Then, for now, it would be best to do as I was told.

I changed my clothes and went outside.

I should have been lost, but my body naturally started walking in one direction.

I thought that if I walked this way, I would surely find something out, so I followed the path that my gut told me to take.

“Feels familiar… but it’s a place I’ve never been before…”

The place I arrived at was a huge building.

The surroundings were completely different from what I knew, but this place was even more so.

Looking around, students my age were talking to each other and walking into the building.

Is this the place called school?

Forcing myself to ignore the lingering sense of incongruity, I was about to walk inside when…

Tap!

“Evan! Hello~!”

“…?!”

Someone with a familiar voice called my name.

I reflexively turned my head towards the direction of the voice.

Long pink hair, a hideous chest that looked like it had three heads… and a girl with a pure and beautiful appearance was waving her hand at me with a bright smile.

“Uriel…?”

It was Uriel.

“Yes, that’s right~ It’s Uriel~”

Something seems off about Uriel’s condition.

Anyway… it was good news that Uriel was here.

For a moment, I doubted if it was really the Uriel I knew, but it wouldn’t be right to immediately doubt her.

First, I should ask about the current situation.

There was no guarantee that she would know anything just because she was Uriel, but judging from her appearance, she seemed familiar, so I thought she might have at least some information.

The fact that we met like this after falling together meant that Stella and Aria must be somewhere too.

I took a breath and asked Uriel quietly.

“The fact that you’re here… does that mean the others came here too?”

“Came here?”

“I mean… this world.”

I wasn't even sure if it was this world, but I asked because I thought the others would be the same since I woke up here as soon as I fell from there.

"?"

But for some reason, instead of answering my question, Uriel just tilted her head as if she didn't know what I was talking about.

What?

Is that not it?

I was embarrassed by Uriel's answer and was about to ask again properly, but before that, Uriel seemed to understand what I meant and nodded, her eyes shining.

No… did she really understand?

"Yes, that's right! Just a moment!"

With that, Uriel disappeared.

Uriel's blank expression, as if she didn't understand what I was saying, and her playful appearance.

If she had suddenly fallen into this place like me, it would have been absurd for her to react like that.

I had been feeling something was off since a while ago, but Uriel's reaction made me even more certain.

"Evan~!"

While I was thinking deeply about the situation, Uriel, who had left for a moment, came back and called me.

"I brought her~!"

She said, along with those words.

At that, I turned my head and looked behind Uriel.

“Yo, Evan.”

“Oh… hello.”

“What, your reaction is not very enthusiastic?”

Stella said in an unpleasant tone, but I couldn’t say anything to Stella’s words.

Stella was strange too.

Her personality, her clothes, and even her way of speaking.

There was nothing that wasn’t strange.

‘What the hell is going on…?’

At this point, I even doubted if this was really a Trial.

Just looking at the surroundings, this place felt like real reality too.

Stella, who was watching me blankly as I didn’t understand the situation, still had an unpleasant expression on her face, but then she seemed to realize something, smiled, and nudged my waist with her elbow.

“Looks like your girlfriend didn’t say hello first, so that’s why.”

“G-girlfriend?”

What was that all of a sudden?

I didn’t even understand what the word girlfriend meant.

“What do you mean, girlfriend…?”

“What? You don’t know that? You’re really weird today.”

“…”

I asked because I didn’t know, but I was treated like a weird person.

“Girlfriend, I mean girlfriend. Did you forget your girlfriend?”

“G-girlfriend?”

Is that the meaning of the word I know?

I had never had a girlfriend in my life, so hearing that I had a girlfriend was like a bolt from the blue.

“What is…”

Perhaps Stella was frustrated by my stuttering, she looked at me with an absurd gaze, snorted, and looked down to the side, saying.

“Aria. Your husband wants to see you.”

“… Please don’t call me your husband.”

This voice is…?

It was definitely a voice I had never heard before.

It was a voice I was hearing for the first time, but for some reason, it felt familiar.

Stella pushed her forward as if telling her to come forward, and a girl who had been pushed forward stood in front of me with a hesitant expression.

A girl with clear blonde hair and a beautiful appearance stood in front of me, looking restless… her blue eyes were shaking back and forth.

I muttered the name of the girl in front of me in a trembling voice.

“Aria…?”

The girl standing in front of me,

Surely, the girl who had a disability of not being able to see or hear.

Aria, who is the same academy student, the Saintess, and my colleague…

“Evan… Brother.”

With both eyes open, she was definitely looking at me.

4 - Trial of Wisdom

“What in the world is going on…?”

I took Aria to a secluded place. Aria didn't refuse my touch, perhaps because she wanted to talk as much as I did.

As soon as we arrived, I asked Aria, and she looked up at me intently.

“… I'm saying this just in case, but the Trial isn't wrong. We are definitely undergoing the Trial right now.”

“Undergoing the Trial…?”

“That's right. I didn't expect this kind of Trial either… but anyway, we're still inside the dungeon. Probably… in a state of unconsciousness.”

This is the Trial?

What kind of things are ancient technologies, anyway…

“It's a completely new world…”

Bringing us to a place like this, and even making us act naturally, wasn't normal.

I wasn't sure if magic could even do something like this.

Maybe only a grand master of illusion magic could do it.

“So, what am I supposed to do here now?”

“… That's…”

“That is?”

“…”

Aria was silent for a while.

Is there something wrong, or is there a reason why she can't tell me what I'm supposed to do here?

“I… don't really know either.”

“… Huh?”

I made a blank expression at the answer.

It was an answer I hadn't expected at all.

The Aria we had seen so far was the Saintess who knew everything.

But…

'Aria… was also human…'

Perhaps because the image she had shown so far was so inhuman, she had accomplished many things that were impossible for ordinary people, and she had even found a dungeon that no one knew about by receiving a Divine Revelation from the Goddess, which was the opposite of her current appearance.

I wasn't going to say that such an appearance was strange.

She's a person, so of course she could be like that.

It's just… Aria was the one who brought up the story of this Trial of Wisdom, but I was surprised that Aria herself didn't know it would be this kind of Trial.

She said she learned about this place from the Forbidden Archive, so the information must have been entirely in that ancient book, but considering how Aria reads books, it's likely that there was no Thought-form with an explanation of the Trial in the ancient book.

Aria wouldn't have missed something like that.

“I'm sorry. I didn't know it would be like this…”

“No, no, it's okay. More than that, what happened to those two?”

“… I'm not sure, but unlike me, the Saintess, and Evan, the Hero, it seems that Stella and Uriel weren't recognized by the Trial.”

Aria said, looking at the two of them.

Right now, it probably feels like they're dreaming, Aria added.

“Something… feels strange.”

“Yes?”

“Seeing you speak directly… until now, we've only been talking through Thought-forms.”

“… That's right.”

Aria said in a murmur, with a somewhat sad smile.

…

I suddenly had a thought.

If we return to reality, Aria's eyes and ears will surely return to normal.

I heard that the disability was congenital.

So, from Aria's point of view… although it's not the world she originally lived in, she can see with both eyes and hear with both ears.

'Then, even if it's just for now…'

Even if it's just for this short time while we're undergoing the Trial, even though it's not the world we originally lived in, I wanted to show her around and give her various experiences.

Even if this is a dream world, if we don't lose our memories when we return to normal, we can eventually make it a memory, right?

“Aria.”

“Yes?”

“… No, let's go to school first.”

The two of them will be waiting.

First, it would be good to go back and find a way to solve the Trial while living a normal life.

Aria has lived such a difficult life up to this point.

Isn't it okay to play a little?

If we don't even allow this much… if the world will be destroyed by just taking a short break like this.

Wouldn't it be okay for such a world to be destroyed?

'No, no matter what, that's not right.'

I don't know how much the time difference is between this world and the original world.

Maybe it's flowing the same way there as it is here… but we should go back before the second semester starts.

“Then, should we set the date to before the Academy starts the second semester…?”

Aria nodded at my words.

Then, the number of days left is about 30 days.

Within that time, we must find out what this Trial is trying to test and solve it.

“It's very difficult…”

So, it's the Trial of Wisdom.

I thought carefully about what the dungeon was asking for, but nothing came to mind.

It was only natural.

I have no information about the Trial, so how could I know what it's asking for?

'Should I go in and think about it some more?'

Aria doesn't seem to know much either, and according to my memories, it seems like I have to go to a place called school quickly, so I decided to stop thinking for now.

I need to put out the urgent fire first.

“School… it's similar to the Academy.The class content was extremely ordinary.

No, if we think about it from our perspective, it's not ordinary, but rather special.

Because we learned things that the Academy doesn't teach.

It wasn't just the Academy.

I even wondered if the knowledge being taught here was actually the knowledge of the original world.

The things they teach at school… were definitely ordinary, but the content was all things that only nobles could barely learn.

What's more, they were teaching even more in-depth things from that information that only nobles could learn, without a second thought.

Frankly speaking, I didn't understand anything among the things they were teaching.

Although I'm not good at studying, so I don't know much about this, I could at least sense that the things they were teaching in class were not ordinary knowledge.

Even more shocking was that Stella and Uriel, who were clearly taking classes together at the Academy and researching and training their respective swordsmanship and magic, were listening to the class as if they were used to it.

“What is this world, anyway…?”

It felt like a completely new world, a different world, rather than an illusion shown in the Trial.

“Hiccup,”

I muttered in disbelief, and Aria next to me flinched.

“Aria?”

“Ah, it's nothing.”

“Huh?”

Why is she reacting like this?

I was briefly puzzled, but soon I thought it didn't matter.

Well, Aria…

She often knew information that most people didn't know, so maybe there's something she can't say.

I don't know what it is, but it's better not to ask.

“First… I think it would be good to look around for something.”

As soon as I said that, Stella, who had approached because Aria and I were sticking together and she thought I was sticking to my girlfriend too much, said in a voice full of dissatisfaction.

And then, she left only the words that she was jealous that I had a lover, and disappeared with Uriel, saying that they, who were single, would leave.

“Ahaha… a lover… it's kind of amazing…”

It seems that we are already recognized as lovers by the people here, and there are quite a few people who praise us for being hot when we walk around together.

When I'm with the guys away from Aria, they ask me all sorts of things, like how far I've gone with Aria, or what Aria feels like when we're alone.

Even that…

'They wouldn't ask about that, would they…'

When they asked if I had ever had sex, I felt a headache coming on.

Seriously, why are they asking about that…

“Evan?”

“Ah, sorry… I was thinking about a lot of things…”

As I sighed, recalling what had happened earlier, Aria called me in a questioning voice.

She still doesn't seem to be used to it…

'Well, whatever.'

It's okay if she's cute.

“To repeat what I said earlier, I thought it would be good to look around here and there. How about walking around the village? together?”

“Ah…”

… It wasn't without ulterior motives.

Anyway, she's the girl I like…

But I also thought that if I didn't do this, I wouldn't be able to find any clues.

At the same time, I wanted to show her as much as possible.

Even though I don't know where this place is.

“… I think it would be good to do that.”

When Aria answered with a sincere expression, I was happy that I could walk around with her, but at the same time, I thought that she was still like Aria.

Hmm… I'm still far behind.

Haha…

5 - Trial of Wisdom

“Hoo…”

Evan sighed, looking up at the sunset sky.

He glanced down at his smartphone, thinking about how much time had already passed.

‘This thing called a smartphone… it’s amazing…’

He had come to this place with a lot of knowledge and memories to help him get used to living here, but it still felt incredibly strange.

Aria was gazing at the crimson sky with a look of wonder.

Watching her, Evan thought to himself.

‘This situation… it’s not a dream…’

Until this morning, or even just after class had ended, he had wondered if he was dreaming.

But it wasn’t.

Every single person walking around seemed real, and the slowly setting sun looked just as real.

Evan turned to Aria.

He remembered that when they had first set out together, they were seriously thinking about what the Trial demanded of them, but somewhere along the way, they had started enjoying themselves, looking around as if none of that mattered.

As the sun began to set, and after seeing Aria looking at the sky with such wonder, he was reminded of their original purpose: to find a clue to return to their original world.

But now, none of that seemed to matter.

Even if they tried to figure out what the Trial demanded, it still wasn't certain that they would be able to find it.

In that situation, he thought it would be even harder if they kept trying to find it every day.

They still had plenty of time to look, and more than anything, he wanted to show Aria as much as possible.

Since they had plenty of time, he figured they could take it easy and maybe stumble upon a clue, taking an optimistic view.

Besides…

'It's not like I can figure it out by just worrying about it.'

So, he thought it would be better to look around and explore.

Even if you know something in your head, it's very different from seeing it in person… for example, even if you take pictures of the surroundings with this smartphone and show them to someone else, it's not easy for someone who has never been there to imagine what it's like.

That was the idea.

Especially in a situation where they were relying on uncertain memories, it was inevitable that he would want to see things for himself.

However…

'I feel like we've been walking around for quite a while, but there's nothing to show for it…'

As soon as school was over, they walked around the entire city, but they didn't find any clues, or even anything related to them.

Of course, the city was incredibly fascinating to him, who had lived in a world developed with magic. Whether he could find clues or not, he looked around with wonder.

He figured Aria was probably the same.

'Is it because I'm here?'

Aria didn't seem to notice, but even though she tried not to show it, she was clearly excited, looking around with a curious expression.

Aria had probably never acted spoiled to anyone, so it wouldn't be easy for her to show her age as a young girl, rather than as the Saintess, to someone else.

Especially if that someone was the Hero who had to defeat the Demon King with her… it would be even harder to show that side of herself.

In fact, even though it had been over half a year since he started living with Aria, he had only seen her cute or unexpected sides very occasionally, and most of the time she only showed her noble and pure side as the Saintess.

He was always a little disappointed by that, so he couldn't help but be happy to see another unexpected side of her this time.

It's always a pleasure to see a new side of someone you like.

Anyway, after walking around for a while, he noticed that Aria was getting tired, so they sat down on a bench that happened to be nearby.

They seemed to be talking just fine when they were walking around earlier, but now that they were sitting on the bench, it was hard to talk.

How should he put it… he felt an unknown atmosphere that made it hard to start a conversation?

He didn’t know how to explain it, but for whatever reason, they couldn’t talk to each other and an awkward silence continued as they sat on the bench.

‘This won’t do…’

Aria didn’t seem to mind, but Evan didn’t like the idea of just letting it go.

He felt like they should talk about something, but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn’t think of anything to say, which held him back.

After worrying about it for a long time, the words he finally managed to say were…

“So… did you have fun today?”

…

He was screwed.

Evan muttered to himself.

He hadn’t exactly set the mood, and it wasn’t like they had done anything particularly big today, they had just walked around together, but to sit on a bench and ask if she had fun…

If his master saw him now, he would definitely click his tongue and call him pathetic.

‘I don’t want to be treated like that by my master…’

Unlike himself, who still had a bright future ahead of him, his master was a man who had never even met a woman despite his age, and if he was looked at with pity by such a person in regards to women, he might stab himself with the Holy Sword out of shame.

Of course, he would be stabbing himself.

“… Yes. I had a lot of fun.”

"… Huh?"

Evan froze in place at Aria's answer.

He had expected her to say that she was more disappointed than happy, or at least that she wasn't disappointed but it was different from what she had imagined.

After all, the scenery was something Aria had never seen before in her life.

Evan felt the same way, but his meaning was a little different from Aria's.

This world wasn't real, it was just a fake, a world within the Trial.

It probably wasn't what Aria really wanted to see.

"It's very different from what I imagined… but still…"

As Evan expected, Aria said that and looked up at the sky.

Then, she raised her hand and reached out as if to grab the floating clouds in the distance.

"To be able to see with my own eyes, to hear with my own ears… to be able to speak…"

Aria trailed off, looking up at the sky with a faint smile.

Watching her, Evan's excited heart calmed down as he realized that his thoughts were correct.

'What the hell was I thinking about all by myself…'

Aria must have had a lot of thoughts since coming to this world.

Even though it was a Trial, she must have mixed feelings about being able to enjoy things that she thought she would never be able to enjoy in her life.

Even if she had regrets, it was probably because she was seeing another world that was only created as an illusion, rather than seeing the world she originally lived in with her own eyes, which would be a great disappointment to Aria.

Evan made a guilty expression.

'I shouldn't have brought it up…'

He wondered if he had said something unnecessary, just as…

"You don't have to make that face, Brother Evan."

"… Huh?"

"Even though this place is within the Trial… and it's definitely a shame that it's not the world I lived in…"

Aria smiled.

"Thank you so much for taking me around today."

"Aria…"

"More than anything, I'm happier that I can see everyone like this, you know? Sister Stella too… and Sister Uriel too."

Evan was speechless at Aria's words.

He thought she would be disappointed… he thought she would be sad.

He thought that even though she could see with her own eyes, this place was just an illusion, and it wasn't what Aria really wanted to see… he had been presuming all along.

But Aria wasn't like that.

Aria wasn't seeing the things that Evan was thinking about.

Aria was seeing other things.

Aria didn't want to see the surrounding scenery with her own eyes.

"More than anything… I'm really happy that I can see Brother Evan with my own eyes!"

Aria's eyes were directed at us,

No…

"Aria…"

They were directed at me.

Aria's shadowed face was reflected in Evan's eyes against the backdrop of the setting sun.

Evan looked down at Aria, who was smiling happily at him.

Aria's eyes, which had been closed for her entire life, were shining brighter than ever before.

6 - Trial of Wisdom

How many days had passed since we entered the world within the Trial?

"Haa…"

"Ugh…"

We still hadn't found a single clue as to what the Trial was demanding.

At first, we thought it didn't matter, that we'd vaguely spend time and eventually figure it out, but after several days of finding nothing, that thought began to fade.

We needed to figure something out to even begin to worry, but we hadn't obtained any information, so we couldn't even worry.

But…

'It's enjoyable.'

Living in this world was too enjoyable.

Even if it was just how others saw us, Aria and I were in a relationship… and even though it wasn't the world we lived in, we could all have fun together.

"What's wrong with you two?"

Stella, who had been quietly watching us, reluctantly asked.

Uriel was also looking at Aria and me with a worried expression.

"Um…"

Would they know something?

Perhaps there was a meaning we didn't know, so asking them might be a good idea.

Thinking that, I asked Stella, "Do you happen to know what 'wisdom' means?"

"…I'd be a little worried if you didn't know what that meant."

Stella asked me with a dumbfounded tone.

…

To be honest, I thought so too.

At first, when they said it was the Dungeon of Wisdom, I thought it would be some kind of Trial where they'd give us problems and we'd solve them, but it was nothing like that.

If they dropped us into a completely different world without telling us anything, who would accept that as a Trial?

We only thought we were in the Dungeon of Wisdom because we were dropped here immediately after they said they would start the Trial in the Dungeon of Wisdom.

If that weren't the case, we might have thought we had fallen into a completely different world.

"So? What do you think?"

"Well… the word 'wisdom' itself has several meanings… but the basic meaning is the ability to understand and judge something."

"…"

Then this Trial makes even less sense.

Where exactly is the element in this world that tests the ability to understand and judge something?

"Well, in other meanings, it's being wise… and clever. Being able to control emotions and bring public benefit and peace? It's written as a kind of virtue that allows for correct judgment and providing evidence."

Stella, who was looking up the meaning on her smartphone, muttered as if she had just realized there was a deeper meaning.

'Correct judgment and evidence… emotional control… public benefit… peace…'

Hearing that, I felt like I was starting to understand what this Trial was demanding.

'Could it be…'

I thought it couldn't be, but it was hard to deny what I was thinking.

There are many things about wisdom, but it refers to a clever mind that can make correct judgments about the current situation, control emotions, and create public benefit or peace… a mind that can make such judgments and provide evidence.

I'm not sure if that's what the Trial is demanding.

If I knew that, I wouldn't have struggled from the beginning.

But one thing was certain.

'I don't want to leave this world…'

I know that this place isn't the real world.

Even so, what I want, and what Aria wants.

Even Stella and Uriel, though they aren't the two people we knew… this world where everyone is having fun…

This world, where we can throw away the duty to defeat the Demon King and live as friends, was too sweet.

That was inevitable, because this world was like a paradise for all of us.

Even if I had a grasp of it, it didn't mean I knew exactly how to act.

It was only more confusing.

Even that was just barely catching the tail of what the Dungeon of Wisdom was demanding…

So, it was just grasping at a clue.

I wasn't even sure if it was the right clue, but if it wasn't, I really couldn't think of anything else, so I brought it up with the feeling of grasping at straws.

Sitting in the same spot as a week ago… in a place where we share stories after wandering around the city all day, I explained everything to Aria.

Everything about what I had guessed and what conclusions I had come to.

"Hmm…"

After I finished explaining everything to Aria, she couldn't speak for a while.

I wasn't sure if it was right either, but I decided it would be good to at least talk about it.

I didn't say it as if I were telling some amazing fact.

It was hard to recall, but simply being able to recall it meant that it wasn't a very difficult story.

This world is a kind of paradise filled with our wishes, and the Trial of Wisdom gave us this Trial to throw away all these things and leave this place to fulfill our duties as Hero and Saintess.

I asked Aria if that was the Trial the Dungeon was trying to give us.

Aria didn't respond for a while.

Was she thinking that my guess was surprisingly accurate, or was she denying it, thinking it was nonsense?

After finishing the story, I sat quietly and waited for Aria's answer.

"Certainly… since it's the Trial of Wisdom, I can't deny the possibility that it gave us a Trial in that way."

"Does that mean…"

"Yes. If that weren't the case, there's no way I could be seeing with my own eyes and hearing with my own ears like this."

"…"

Evan wanted to say that wasn't the case to Aria, who was talking seriously, but if I said that it didn't seem right here, everything I said would be meaningless.

I nodded silently.

"I see… is the Trial solved if we give up everything in this world and decide to return to our original world and defeat the Demon King?"

"…I don't know either."

In fact, making that decision itself was too difficult.

About the duties I have… and even the people left in the original world, all of them are important to me, but even so, if you ask me if I want to leave this place, it's not easy to answer right away.

This place may have its own difficulties, but at least for me, there's no place as good to live as this place.

Most people who are born receive proper education, and even I, who lived in a world of magic, can enjoy things that are so comfortable and taken for

granted… this world where no one dies easily and lives peacefully.

Unlike the world where we struggled to survive, to eat and live, and where death was rampant everywhere… I sometimes think that this place is one of the worlds heading towards the ideal that everyone seeks.

But I knew.

That such a world could not exist.

"Aria… what do you think about this world?"

"This world… so you're talking about the place we are now."

"Yeah."

What does Aria think?

Perhaps Aria is seriously thinking about returning to the original world. She has been showing that side of her all along, so even if it is a world where she can see and hear and doesn't have to sacrifice herself…

Wouldn't she think that such a world is meaningless and want to return to the original world?

That's what I thought.

I thought she would tell me not to say nonsense and that of course I should decide to return to the original world.

However,

"I don't know…"

Aria smiled faintly and turned her head slightly.

"Aria…?"

I widened my eyes.

I thought Aria would answer right away, but why?

Aria, who said that…

"I want to stay like this a little longer."

She was making a face that she didn't want to return to the original world.

.

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'Unexpected.'

Is the Hero still a Hero?

It's only been a week since I realized what this Trial means, but seeing how they're grasping the outline, I think they'll realize it soon even if I don't give them any hints.

Well… I really didn't know when I first came in, but when I looked around, there was a spot-the-difference game that depicted a place similar to this world.

I never thought that the spot-the-difference game would turn into a direction where you directly enter the world like this… if the Trial is the same as I knew it, what the Dungeon of Wisdom is demanding is to see if you can put everything you have on the line to defeat the Demon King, that is, to risk your life.

It's a little different from the Trial of Courage, which confirms whether you have the courage to face the Demon King… and whether you can overcome the fear of the unknown.

That's a relief, but…

'Where are you going so soon?'

Since time doesn't flow anyway, I'm thinking of resting here for a while before leaving.

They don't seem to have reached a conclusion yet, so should I give them more time to think about it?

I smiled inwardly as I looked at Evan's face, which I had never seen before, but could finally see properly after coming to this world.

7 - Trial of Wisdom

We continued in that slightly awkward atmosphere before naturally parting ways.

Everyone knew the way back home in their heads, and since we had spent a week in this place, returning home wasn't a problem at all.

After that, we traveled around this world for quite a long time, seeing it with our own eyes.

Although it wasn't the world we originally lived in, it felt like a new experience for me, and for Aria, it was a world she never thought she would see with her own eyes.

Even though it was a different world, it was a joy to see Aria happy just seeing the real thing with her own eyes.

Aria seemed happy as well.

One day, as we were spending our days like that...

"An amusement park?"

"What do you think? It's perfect for all of us to go together!"

"Well... I thought it would be nice to go. Do you guys want to come along?"

Stella's sudden suggestion to go to an amusement park made me hesitate.

It might sound strange to say this after having fun for two weeks, but while living in this Trial world, I kept thinking that things couldn't go on like this.

Of course, I'm not saying that receiving this Trial is wrong.

I don't know what happened to Stella and Uriel, but Aria said that there's no need to worry about them, so I don't need to worry for now. Anyway, it's a bit different from back then, but we're still in a dungeon receiving a Trial.

But it was hard to believe that the Trial we are receiving now is fake.

If it's possible to create a world like this, it must be due to the ancient technology that Aria mentioned, and the necklace I received from the Trial of Strength eventually helped me unleash the power of the Hero.

I'm sure that if we successfully pass this Trial of Wisdom, things will turn out well.

Even so, the reason I feel so uneasy is probably... because I haven't found anything about this Trial, or how to pass it.

It's already been two weeks since we entered this world, and I haven't found any clues.

I thought it was okay for the first week.

Rather, I focused on the word "wisdom" in a situation where I didn't know anything, and I thought I had a grasp of it to some extent.

This world was suspiciously fulfilling things that we didn't have... things that we wanted, so I thought that the Trial dungeon was giving us a Trial in that direction.

But that was it.

I only knew that it was asking for something related to wisdom, and perhaps I had abandoned everything else to find that out.

If I only look at the words "Trial of Wisdom," I should prove something related to wisdom to pass the Trial... but without any explanation, I was just dropped here, so I couldn't figure out what it was.

After saying that we would start the Trial, we were dropped somewhere and brought to this world, and then nothing has been said since then, right?

They don't even tell us what to do, so isn't it stranger to find clues in such a situation?

Moreover, it's been half the time since we first set the time limit, and I haven't found anything yet, so I, who think I need to get out of here as soon as possible, can't help but feel impatient.

"..."

I turned to look at Aria.

I wanted to ask Aria about this dungeon again.

Of course, there's no point in asking Aria about this dungeon.

Just recently, when I asked Aria if she knew about this dungeon, she said that the ancient texts only mentioned where the Trial of Wisdom existed, but it didn't say exactly what kind of Trial the dungeon would give.

In other words, Aria only knew that there was a Trial dungeon here, but she didn't know the details about it.

There's no reason for her to lie as someone who is receiving the Trial with me, and even if that wasn't the case, there's no way I could doubt Aria.

'It's difficult.'

With the Trial of Strength, I could just push all my strength, but I have no idea what to do with this Trial.

I even started to have negative thoughts about whether I could pass this Trial.

I looked at Aria with a troubled expression.

I know things can't go on like this.

There's only half the time left until the semester starts, and if I'm still not finding any proper clues, I can't just keep playing around.

Now is the time to do something, but even if I try to do everything I can, I don't know where to start, so I can't do anything.

Even if I try to find information, I don't know where to get it.

It's a frustrating situation.

I'm sure that's the case, but why...

'I want to see Aria's happy face even a little more.'

Right now, more than anything, I wanted to go to the amusement park with Aria.

Aria has lived with a disability since she was young.

She probably never got to play properly since she was a child.

Not only that, but she was chosen as the Saintess and has been sacrificing herself for the world ever since.

Hasn't she had to live her whole life with the duty of being chosen by the Goddess and defeating the Demon King to save this world?

She's only rested for two weeks.

It's only been two weeks since she was able to see and hear with her eyes and ears, which she thought would be impossible.

Even if it's not the original world, I wanted to show her more things, more beautiful things.

There are still two weeks left, so it should be okay to go out for a day or two.

...

...

I knew what I had to say.

I smiled and asked Aria.

"Aria, what do you think?"

"Are you talking about the amusement park?"

Aria, who flinched at my question, turned to look at me and asked.

I nodded.

"Yeah... the amusement park. Do you want to go?"

She's not showing it, but I could tell.

I could tell that Aria wanted to go to the amusement park.

'... Huh?'

The expression on Aria's face at that moment was strange.

She looked like she was longing for something.

What could she be longing for in a place like this? I thought it was just my imagination, but...

'What was that expression just now...'

It was an expression that I couldn't just ignore... an expression that Aria had never made before.

"... Yes."

In the meantime, Aria, who had been lost in thought for a while, quietly nodded and answered.

Uriel smiled brightly at that.

"Then let's leave right away~!"

Aria, who was happily watching Uriel shouting happily and Stella next to her saying that we should go on the weekend because school hasn't ended yet, laughed softly.

Listening to their conversation, I finally remembered an important fact.

Come to think of it, if we want to go to the amusement park, we need time, so we have to go on the weekend after all.

I had forgotten that school was similar to the academy.

No, it's more free than the academy, but anyway, you can't just go out whenever you want for a certain amount of time.

...

My vision went dark...

We were finally able to leave for the amusement park after spending another day.

I didn't expect another day to be added, but since we all decided to go together, I can't back out now.

Not that I have any intention of backing out in the first place.

"Wow~ There are so many people~!"

"There are bound to be a lot of people during this time. It's peak season."

Amusement parks usually have so many people on weekends that they are called peak season, so naturally the lines are long.

I was surprised by the number of people around me, but Stella looked at me with a dissatisfied expression.

"You guys... aren't you too close?"

"..."

"What can I do? The space is like this..."

There were so many people that I was being pushed around and ended up sticking close to Aria.

Aria doesn't seem to think much of it... no, maybe she's feeling hot because there are too many people.

Stella was looking at me with a dissatisfied look, as if she didn't like it.

Of course, I don't mind being with her, and I'm actually happy, but I'm getting this kind of look even though I didn't intend to, so I might be a little wronged.

More than that, why does Stella keep giving me that look...

I really don't know.

8 - Trial of Wisdom

There are so many people…

“Woo… what should we ride first…?”

“Well… it seems like there will be crowds everywhere we go.”

Seeing so many people walking around, it was clear that no matter which ride we went to, there would be a long line.

“At this rate… we won’t be able to ride much.”

Stella said with a dissatisfied voice.

As she said, we came to have fun together, but there were so many people that we had to wait a long time every time we tried to ride something.

I heard that amusement parks during peak season are unbelievably crowded, but I never imagined so many people would come…

“Hoo…”

I secretly sighed deeply.

It’s natural since it’s the weekend, but usually, people want to relax and have fun, so I couldn’t help but feel disappointed.

Just standing here feels suffocating, and because there are so many people, the air is stuffy, making it painful to even stand.

I was worried about Evan, so I looked at him, and thankfully, he didn’t seem to be having a hard time. Come to think of it, I feel like my stamina, or overall body condition, has improved a bit compared to when I was in my original world.

‘Seriously…’

Really, can’t you give me a break?

Good grief…

Even if I created this world by pulling out things from my memories, what’s with creating a world that makes me so homesick?

…

Was I missing my original world that much?

Even though… the world before I came to this world is one I could never enjoy in my lifetime.

I chuckled.

‘I should end this soon.’

Today was the day I would return to my original world.

As expected of the Hero, he figured out what this world wanted without being told anything. He’s really amazing.

I should stop being stubborn starting today.

This short vacation is over.

Although the vacation ends today, I still want to have fun and leave with good memories since it’s the last day.

“Then, should we eat first?”

“… Ah! Good idea! I happen to know a good restaurant!”

“You’ve never been here before, have you? How do you know?”

“Hmm… Before coming, I naturally looked up where the most delicious restaurant is!”

Indeed, do you have to go that far before coming to an amusement park…?

I thought about it for a moment, but since we came all the way here, we should eat something delicious to make it a more enjoyable memory.

Of course, if that becomes the main focus, it defeats the purpose of coming to have fun, but if we eat something bad, our excitement will fade, so I think it’s a good thing she did that.

I don’t know what kind of food it is, but if we’re eating in a place like this, I hope it’s not only delicious but also looks fancy.

I won’t be able to see anything for a while after I go back, so I want to see as much as possible.

“Then, should we eat first?”

Evan turned his head and asked, so I smiled brightly.

We headed straight to the restaurant.

After finishing our meal, we went outside and wandered around, enjoying the amusement park to the fullest.

It was a shame that we had to wait at least 10 minutes for each ride, but it couldn’t be helped, so it didn’t bother me that much.

And riding rides isn’t the only way to have fun. Looking around and trying snacks is also a treat.

Anyway, we had a really fun time for our first time coming here without knowing much.

“Haa… that was fun…”

“What should we ride next?!”

“It’s getting late, so shouldn’t we go back…?”

Uriel made a disappointed face at my words.

Seriously, what’s with making that face after playing all day?

How much do you have to play to be satisfied…?

“Then, since it’s the last one, how about riding that?”

Stella pointed to something, suggesting we ride it for the last time…

“… Ferris wheel?”

It was the Ferris wheel that had been visible since we first entered the amusement park.

At Stella’s suggestion to ride it last, Uriel immediately raised her hand and shouted in agreement.

“…”

I can feel the stares around me…

Thinking about it now, Uriel seems to react excessively to even the smallest things.

It’s not necessarily a problem, but she’s showing that side of herself in a situation like this with so many people, so to be honest, it’s a bit embarrassing.

I want to tell her to tone it down, but I can’t bring myself to get angry at Uriel, who’s smiling so innocently, so I end up letting it go again.

She’s only like this in this world anyway. She’ll go back to normal when we return.

“… I want to ride it.”

At that moment, Aria said, looking at the Ferris wheel with sparkling eyes.

It was the first time Aria had shown such a noticeable reaction, so everyone seemed surprised. I, too, was taken aback by Aria’s sparkling eyes and stood still. Stella, who was the first to come to her senses, approached me and nudged me with her elbow.

“Ah… ahem, then let’s go ride it.”

Could I refuse when Aria wants to ride it?

Taking Stella, Uriel, and Aria with me, we approached the Ferris wheel.

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Is it because there are so many people trying to ride the Ferris wheel at this time?

The line was very long.

“The line is really long…”

“I know…”

I was starting to get tired.

It’s not like the Ferris wheel takes only a few people, but there are so many people in line that we had to wait a long time for our turn.

Still, I patiently waited, and little by little, our turn approached.

Finally, it was our turn to ride.

Thud,

“Eh…”

Aria, pushed by the people in line, was pushed forward and entered the Ferris wheel first. Surprised, I quickly reached out to grab Aria and walked forward, naturally separating from Stella and Uriel, who were talking.

The employee who was watching us from the side seemed to think we were a couple and blocked Stella and Uriel from entering as soon as Aria and I entered the Ferris wheel.

“Eh…”

“E, Evan?!”

Uriel and Stella called out to me in surprised, urgent voices, but it was already too late.

Aria and I, pushed inside, ended up riding the Ferris wheel together.

“Sorry for not catching you sooner…”

Looking down at Stella and Uriel, who were riding in the Ferris wheel right after us, I apologized to Aria, who was sitting next to me.

Aria laughed, saying there was no reason to apologize since she didn’t do anything wrong.

I scratched the back of my head, feeling awkward.

‘Come to think of it… I’m alone with Aria…’

I wanted to be with Aria alone.

I don’t know why…

I think it’s probably because I like Aria.

Of course, I'd be too embarrassed to say that out loud.

Looking at Aria, who was looking out the window, I smiled.

I thought I shouldn't do this just a while ago, but seeing Aria enjoying herself while looking outside, I wonder if that matters.

Rather…

"… I guess that won't work."

If I had such thoughts, I would never be able to escape this world.

It's fortunate that at least Aria has memories of the previous world like me, but what about Stella and Uriel?

I have to go back.

Go back and… defeat the Demon King and bring peace to the world.

That's what I have to do.

"Aria, did you have fun today?"

"Of course. I had a lot of fun."

Aria answered with a smile.

I was glad she seemed to be genuinely enjoying herself.

While I was looking at Aria and smiling contentedly, Aria, who had been looking up at me for a moment, lowered her head.

Then, she got up from her seat and moved closer to me.

"… Aria?"

Why is she coming closer to me? I wondered.

Aria didn’t say anything.

She was just sitting next to me, continuing to look out the window.

After a long time of no conversation between us, Aria, who had been looking down and not saying anything, finally opened her mouth.

“… Evan.”

Calling my name.

“…?!”

Something was wrong.

Aria had never called me without adding ‘Hero’ or ‘Brother’ except when she called me Hero.

She had never called me like that… without any honorifics.

I sensed that Aria’s atmosphere was unusual.

“Really… I guess the Hero is really the Hero.”

“What are you talking about…?”

“I didn’t tell you anything… but I didn’t think you’d figure out what this Trial wants.”

Aria’s expression as she said that was,

“…”

So sad.

9 - Trial of Wisdom

"..."

Was it because my tone changed?

Or was it because he didn't understand what I said?

I don't know which, but Evan seemed quite surprised by my sudden words.

Well… I guess it was understandable.

I had been maintaining the Saintess persona all this time, and now I was suddenly dropping the act and speaking in a normal tone.

I didn't initially intend to speak like this, but I thought it would be better to talk seriously in this situation.

More than anything…

'Everything will feel like a dream anyway...'

It's not certain.

There's just a script in the game that says it feels like a dream after completing the Trial, so I'm only assuming that's how it will be.

Honestly, I was surprised.

I didn't know everything about this Trial dungeon either.

I could only make predictions based on my experience playing the game, and I didn't have any definite information about what this Trial demanded from us.

Even in the game, it was just about finding the differences in pictures or solving puzzles, so there was no way I could know what this Trial required of us.

But if it becomes reality, the story changes a bit.

Specifically, at the very end of the game, there's a scene where the player is directly asked.

'It asked if I would sacrifice myself to save this world.'

And I had to answer using words that affirmed my willingness to do so to receive the notification that I had overcome the Trial of Wisdom and could escape this world.

If I failed to answer correctly there, I would face a bad ending where I would be trapped in this world forever, which was infamous for its ruthlessness in not allowing even a single typo.

At least, I could correct it before pressing next, but the moment I moved on without realizing I had made a typo, it was over.

No matter how I wrote it, if I didn't write it correctly without any typos, it was the same as not clearing the Trial.

Of course, it was a direct path to the bad ending.

No matter how diligently I had been playing the game, the moment I made a single typo in that Trial of Wisdom, the game would end right there.

It was even more notorious because the save file would be deleted as if to prove that I would be trapped in that world forever, making it impossible to load the save file and continue the game.

So, it was bound to be infamous.

But now it has become reality.

I know that the game and reality are completely different, but they must be somewhat similar.

Combining all the information I originally knew about this dungeon from my time here, it turns out that this dungeon ultimately wants one thing.

Will I give up everything I enjoy in this world and return to my original world to subjugate the Demon King, or am I unable to give up the things in this world?

It was a truly simple but terrifying Trial that would trap you in this world forever unless you made up your mind and vowed to subjugate the Demon King.

And…

'It's probably because of me.'

Evan is upright.

That's how he is in the game settings, but the 'Evan' I've seen so far, this man, is too upright.

Yeah… Even without me, he will eventually grow and be able to subjugate the Demon King.

And Stella and Uriel, and other companions who will one day be with Evan, will be charmed by that aspect of him.

There's a reason he's called the Hero.

Being upright isn't always necessarily a good thing, but he's the kind of guy who will bravely step forward to subjugate the Demon King even if he has to bear the burden of being the Hero at such a young age.

However…

'I'm still amazed that I'm in a romantic relationship with Evan...'

I never once wanted to be in a romantic relationship with Evan.

I can say that with certainty.

Of course, Evan feels a little closer to me than Stella or Uriel, and I feel a little strange when I see Evan getting along with them, but that doesn't mean it's because I like Evan.

It's very… different.

Probably…

For now, as Evan said to me earlier, this world is a world where the things that Uriel, Stella, and I wanted in our hearts have come true.

In such a world, the fact that I'm in a romantic relationship with Evan can only be explained by someone wanting that kind of relationship, but of course, Stella and Uriel wouldn't want that, and I wasn't hoping for that either…

'Could it be…'

No way?

Evan likes me?

Honestly, I didn't think that was possible.

I mean, there are so many girls around him who are prettier, more feminine, and have much more voluptuous figures than me, so the fact that he would pass them all over and like me is strange, and there's no way I would believe that.

But with the situation escalating to this point, I can no longer shield him.

Since I couldn't possibly have such feelings, it's practically a foregone conclusion that Evan likes me.

"..."

Looking at Evan's expression, I think I understand a little now…

I used to dismiss it, thinking it couldn't be, but now that I see that embarrassed expression, I'm even more suspicious.

'I want to believe it's not true...'

If it's true that he likes me, it's not easy for me to accept it in a positive way.

He's a character I like, and of course, I would be happy if that character liked me, but if it's a matter of him liking me as a man likes a woman, then the story changes a lot.

…

I was originally a man.

Of course, it's not easy to accept that.

To be honest, I still keep wondering if this is the right thing to do.

But…

'That's not what's important right now.'

There's something more important than that right now.

I was going to apologize for deceiving them all this time.

"First… I want to say I'm sorry."

"Sorry… for what?"

"... Actually, I knew from the beginning what this Trial requires…"

I didn't know everything completely.

To escape the Trial, you had to complete a specific event and directly type in the chat to show your will to return, and only then would the Trial

dungeon acknowledge it and send us back to our original world.

Seeing Evan roughly guessing how to return, I also had the same thought, 'Maybe?'

In that case, you could say that I didn't know, so I decided to push through with the idea that I knew from the beginning.

Well, it's not like they can tell if I'm lying again here…

"..."

Evan stared at me with a blank expression.

Yeah, it's going to be shocking.

It's shocking even to me.

It seemed like a really happy world, a fun world, but Evan, who was thinking about returning, must have been frantically searching for things with an urgent desire to return as soon as possible.

I wasn't looking for anything.

There was no need to look.

Since I knew almost everything about the dungeon, there was no reason to search for information when there wasn't any proper information available.

"... So you lied."

At Evan's words, I silently turned my head and nodded slightly.

I lied.

It had been a while.

Seeing the world with my own eyes, hearing the sounds of the world with my own ears.

For almost three years, I had come to this world and worked hard only to subjugate the Demon King and return to my original world.

Maybe I was a masochist, or I liked being in pain… Of course, it was fun at the time, but in the end, my original goal was to subjugate the Demon King and return to my original world.

Maybe that's why.

This world was the world I originally lived in, the appearance of my original world.

It's clear that I, who had a disability, can now see and hear.

"I wanted to stay a little longer…"

I didn't want to go back right away.

If I went back, I would have to return to the darkness where I couldn't see or hear, and who would want that? In this world where I can play to my heart's content without any worries…

I should be able to take a break, right?

"I wanted to rest…"

After all, time doesn't flow while I'm here… No matter how long I stay, I can go back to that time when I return.

Most of the time spent here is treated as a dream, so no matter how long I stay, my sense of time doesn't change when I return.

It's a very convenient setting, but that's why it's a game.

That was all.

10 - Trial of Wisdom

Evan couldn't speak for a while.

'It must have been hard...'

It was obvious.

Of course, it would have been hard.

Why was he stating the obvious?

To say he didn't know would be rude, considering all the sacrifices Aria had made so far.

Born with congenital visual and auditory impairments, deprived of things everyone should enjoy, she was chosen as the Saintess and burdened with the duty of subjugating the Demon King, a being of terror to all living things.

The power she gained with that duty was salvation for humanity, but nothing short of sacrifice for her… a half-baked ability with an absurd price: she had to bear as much pain as she healed.

If she were an ordinary person, she would have wondered why such an ability was bestowed upon her, and would have been too afraid of the pain she received every time she healed someone to use the ability properly.

All the previous Saintesses were said to have been like that.

They suffered just from healing, and wanted to throw everything away and not bear the duty any longer.

The end of the Saintess was mostly not good.

He had heard it from the Pope.

Most of them went mad, or even if they didn't, they suffered from trauma for the rest of their lives, unable to lead a proper life and dying weak.

Whether they properly sealed the Demon King, failed to seal him, subjugated him, or failed to subjugate him…

That was all irrelevant.

Simply bearing all the pain of someone just by healing them was impossible for someone with an ordinary vessel.

No matter how much of a Saintess she was chosen by the Goddess, there was no way that was possible.

It had only been half a year, but he could be sure.

She was trying to bear all that pain.

With that half-baked ability, she was trying to save countless people.

She had been working so hard, bearing the pain of countless people he couldn't even fathom, all in that small body.

He could only say she was amazing.

That's right.

Aria was not a machine to subjugate the Demon King.

Aria was also a person.

'What on earth was I thinking…'

Evan began to feel disgusted with himself.

He didn't show it outwardly to Aria, but he thought that Aria wouldn't spare her body if it was to subjugate the Demon King or save people.

And that was actually true.

All along, Aria had not spared her body to save people.

However, Evan was disgusted that he had never considered how Aria might be feeling about it.

'I say I like her as a woman… that I respect her, but I didn't even think about what she was feeling while bearing that duty…!'

He hadn't thought about anything.

Or perhaps he had been avoiding thinking about it.

He was arbitrarily applying his own standards to Aria, thinking that the Saintess must be like this.

No, it wasn't that he thought the Saintess must be like this.

He had only been looking at Aria's outward appearance and thought, 'Aria must be thinking like this~' and just assumed it.

He hadn't thought about Aria's inner thoughts at all.

Yet, he was disillusioned with the Goddess for giving such an absurd ability to such a young girl, which was ridiculous.

In the end, they were essentially the same.

Who was despising whom?

It was pathetic.

Evan lowered his head in a subdued mood.

Silence continued for a while.

He didn't know what to say.

This short time, where the Ferris wheel would only make one revolution in the air in just 10 minutes, felt so long to him for some reason.

After a long time of silence, Aria suddenly opened her mouth.

"... I'm sorry."

With a sudden apology.

Evan flinched at Aria's apology.

What was there to apologize for?

She had done nothing wrong, yet she was talking as if she had really done something wrong, and he was overwhelmed with emotion.

He wanted to shout at her not to apologize right away.

But he couldn't.

Yes, he couldn't.

'Even if that shout came out because I felt so pathetic…'

To the listener, it would only sound like blaming, and Evan didn't want Aria to misunderstand it that way.

"..."

Evan looked down at Aria without a word.

Aria couldn't let go of her regretful feelings and was looking outside with a longing gaze.

He didn't know what to say.

He wanted to comfort her, but when he tried to speak, he didn't know what to say as comfort.

She looked like glass, as if she would break at any moment if he said something wrong.

So Evan just reached out into the air and stood still, unable to comfort her properly.

For a long time.

…

…

He didn't want to just pass by without doing anything.

Evan gritted his teeth.

He thought he wanted to comfort her and be her strength, but what was he doing here not doing anything?

'... I don't want this.'

Evan took a breath.

What he could do here,

No, it was ambiguous to say he could do it, but anyway, he wanted to comfort Aria.

He wanted to share the burden with the foolish person who was trying to bear everything alone.

Swoosh.

"... Ah."

Naturally, Evan moved closer to Aria and stuck to her side.

He didn't hug her tightly.

Nor did he lean his body against Aria's back.

He just got a little closer than usual.

Evan didn't say anything.

He didn't know what to say to comfort Aria in this situation.

But did words really need to be necessary?

Evan didn't understand even a little about the emotions that Aria had been holding back.

No, even if he could understand it, who in this world would believe it unless they were in the position of being born with congenital disabilities, being chosen as the Saintess, bearing a heavy burden, and having to subjugate the Demon King…?

Although Evan, too, had come to have the duty to subjugate the Demon King by drawing the Holy Sword, it was not comparable to Aria.

It was a small comfort that he could give because he, too, had the same duty to subjugate the Demon King.

"I… will definitely subjugate the Demon King."

"Evan…"

Aria widened her eyes as she looked at Evan's determination to definitely subjugate the Demon King.

"And…"

Evan raised his hand and gently touched Aria's eyes.

He didn't have any special goals.

He had only been living with a sense of duty to subjugate the Demon King because he had simply drawn the Holy Sword.

He had taken the Trial, but that was only because Aria said it would be good for her, and he had never done anything to become stronger in order to definitely subjugate the Demon King.

But now, maybe… it had changed a little.

He had a new goal, a new dream.

"I want to show you the light someday."

For this lovely girl in front of him,

He would give everything.

Evan once again sincerely vowed.

A strong will to subjugate the Demon King.

"..."

Aria took Evan's hand, which was touching her eyes, with both hands.

Feeling the warmth that was too warm to be a hallucination, she quietly closed her eyes.

Now the false world was over.

"... This is…?"

Looking around at the gradually distorted surroundings, Evan looked around in surprise.

The different but completely identical world, the world in the Trial, was completely collapsing.

In that situation, Aria, who had already closed her eyes, still smiled and said softly to Evan, who was looking around in confusion.

"Thank you, Evan."

Anyway, all of this would be treated like a dream.

"I like you."

Wouldn't it be okay to say just one word, 'I like you'?

Whether that feeling was really the meaning of 'I like you', or whether it was the meaning of saying it to a favorite character, no one could know.

"... Ah."

Evan, who heard that very small but definitely audible word, had a blank expression.

And then,

The world completely collapsed.

11 - Trial of Wisdom

"Ugh…"

I'm awake…

'It feels like I had… a really long dream…'

I remember most, if not all, of what happened there, so it seems that my monologue about it feeling like a dream after the Trial ended wasn't a lie.

Not only me, but Stella, Uriel, and Evan next to me were also getting up, as if they had just woken up.

"What happened…?"

"Ugh… my body… doesn't hurt…?"

"…"

Everyone looked around at their bodies as they woke up.

Well, thanks to some ancient technology or whatever, I clearly remember falling from a high place in my last memory, but when I woke up, there wasn't a single scratch on my body.

Only…

'I can't see…'

I could see clearly in the dream.

Now I can't see anything, and I can't even hear the sounds of things.

The only reason I can hear their voices is because I can read the Thought-forms flowing out, which makes me realize how comfortable I was in the

dream and how dreamlike the time I spent there was.

It's not just my imagination that I already want to go back to the dream world.

…

Right, the dream.

Some might say.

If you can't escape that world forever, wouldn't it be better to live and die in that world until you die of old age? Of course, if you don't know how to escape the Trial and don't strengthen your will to defeat the Demon King, you will live there forever, but.

In the end, I won't be able to return to normal.

If I live and die there forever, nothing will change.

The world without the Hero and Saintess will eventually be destroyed by the invading Demon King Army.

For example, if you were to take all the people in the world to a world where there is no pain, no separation, no conflict, and everyone can live happily, the key point is how many people would accept it.

There are definitely people who would be happy.

But didn't it appear in some movie that the humans who lived in such a world eventually went crazy and all died?

In the end, nothing will change.

More than anything…

'If I stay there as Evan's girlfriend, I'll even get married and have kids!'

I was originally a man.

I'm already upset that I've entered this body in a reality based on a game, but to fall into a fantasy there and live a lifetime of marriage, having kids, laughing, and dying of old age.

Don't talk nonsense.

I will definitely go back.

My goal is more important than having such dreams.

I didn't go through two and a half years of enjoyable suffering, no, real suffering, to face such a bad ending!

'A dream…'

Come to think of it, it really feels like a dream.

I'm sure I was with Evan at the end.

In a Ferris wheel, too…

'Did I tell him my story?'

About why I didn't end the Trial even though I could have ended it a long time ago, and why I kept trying to stay in the Trial.

I think I revealed my true feelings inside, not the Saintess Aria, which I'm usually acting as.

I think I did, but I'm a little vague about exactly what we talked about.

'I think we had a pretty important conversation.'

It feels like a dream.

It's just like a dream, I remember in detail what we talked about at that time, but it feels like it didn't happen in reality.

How should I put it, it can be explained as something that I will forget if I don't try to remember it and write it down somewhere after a certain amount of time.

What did I say at the end…

'I… like… you… did I say that…?'

…

…

…

Wait, what?

'What on earth did I say…?!'

Now that I think about it, did I tell Evan that I liked him back then?!

Only then did I realize what had happened, and I screamed inwardly.

What on earth did I say?!

Of course, liking Evan doesn't mean liking him as a man!

It's just… the words came out without me realizing it because I saw the upright and cool side of my favorite character, a character in the game, and I haven't liked him all along.

Aside from the fact that I wouldn't have acted that way if I really liked him, even though I've been living in this body for quite a while, there's no way I would like a man.

Even if he's one of my favorite characters who has saved me many times, there's no way that could happen…

No matter what! It can never happen!

I shook my head wildly in my mind.

Even so, I couldn't shake off my anxiety and looked at Evan with a worried heart.

I felt like I had to check right away how I felt about Evan.

Fortunately, even when I looked at Evan, there was nothing strange…

Strange…

Hmm.

'Should I call this fortunate…'

I can't see Evan's face because I can't see right now.

I'm still seeing with Holy Power detection, but as I said before, it doesn't look like a real person…

It's literally feeling, so a beauty trap doesn't work on me.

"Aria…? Aria!"

As I was sighing with half relief and half doubt, Evan, who was holding his head and looking around, turned to me, made a surprised expression as soon as he saw me, rushed to me in a fluster, and shook me back and forth.

"Are you okay? Are you hurt anywhere?!"

"Wow, Evan only takes care of his girlfriend."

"That's right~☆"

“…Huh?”

“Huh?”

Stella and Uriel giggled at each other and then shuddered.

At their reactions, Evan and I also turned our heads and looked at Stella and Uriel.

What… did they just say?

Girlfriend?

"Girlfriend… and what was that tone just now…"

"Me too… something's wrong… it feels like it wasn't me…"

"…"

"W-What's going on…?"

Evan looked back at me with a bewildered look and asked.

I wonder.

I want to know that too…

Well, even so, if I make a rough guess based on what I know now, the most likely possibility is that the person who was not recognized by the Trial entered the Trial and received a role and lived as if they were sleeping and dreaming.

We were able to enter the Trial with a clear sense of self thanks to being recognized by the dungeon, so we only feel a little dazed and our memories are jumbled up when we first wake up, but we remember what happened inside like a lucid dream, but the two of them are different from us.

Actually, I wanted to be recognized.

In the game, you could just form a party and enter, and it would give a huge amount of experience to the entire party, and you could just eat it up.

Now I can't even tell if I've received experience or not.

Anyway, the fact that they came inside with us instead of being completely rejected means that they were recognized to some extent, but I don't know if that means they received experience and a foundation for growth was created.

If it were in the game, I could just check it numerically, but this is reality, so that's impossible.

So… what I mean is that Stella and Uriel at that time were both the same Stella and Uriel we knew, so they unknowingly used that tone at that time.

Even though they think of it as a dream now, they were dragged into the Trial and assimilated for quite a long time, so it's not strange that they acted like that.

Anyway, we were talking to each other and discussing the current general situation.

Kugugung!

"W-What is it?!"

- [Congratulations on overcoming the Trial of Wisdom, Hero.]

"Isn't this the voice… the same voice as before?"

- [You did not abandon everything in that world and abandon your duty.]

"…"

Evan stood up silently.

"In the end, it's all just an illusion, all meaningless."

Mental growth, the Trial of Wisdom is in charge of that.

"I will win it with my own hands."

Evan has grown one step further as a Hero.

And it wasn't just Evan who grew.

- [All the achievements and experiences you have achieved will be your nourishment.]

Magic began to be felt around us, just like when we fell earlier.

- [I hope… you will have that will and defeat the Demon King.]

The dungeon's voice was the last thing it said, and the magic circle engraved under the ground shone.

"I'll do it. Definitely."

Soon, the wavelength of Holy Power that was grasping the surroundings was cut off and it went dark.

Trial of Wisdom (Interlude)

“… Ah.”

When I came to, we were somehow standing on a sandy beach.

It seemed the Teleportation was successful.

Stella, looking around, scratched her head as if dumbfounded and said,

“What is this… It was supposed to be a Trial, but it doesn’t seem like much…”

We just had a nice vacation.

Well… I already knew how to break through the Trial, and Evan, even if I didn’t tell him, would have figured it out on his own, so no matter what, we would have eventually gotten out of the Trial.

It’s just that we were able to get out right away.

Originally, it would have been right to get out immediately, but since there wouldn’t be much difference in time no matter when we left, I just thought it would be good to rest enough before leaving since we had already entered the Trial.

From their perspective, it would feel like they had a moderately memorable dream without anything happening, so it’s not strange that they would react like that.

“Is that so for Stella too… I feel the same way.”

“… Huh, Uriel, I don’t think you’ve ever called me by my name like that before.”

“Stella is the same, though?”

“Hmm…”

Well… it seems that what happened in that dream wasn’t entirely meaningless.

Just looking at the current situation, it was something Uriel wouldn’t have even imagined before taking the Trial.

Before starting the Trial, Uriel kept using honorifics, but now, calling me without honorifics feels like treating me like a real friend.

“If it’s not rude, how about we just drop the honorifics altogether?!”

She even seems to like it, asking if we should just keep the titles as they are, which is confusing, but Stella, having been called that way in the dream, didn’t seem to mind calling her Uriel either.

It wasn’t intentional, but it seems that going into the Trial together this time has made their friendship even stronger.

“You two too!”

Uriel’s gaze turned to us.

Why suddenly towards us…

While I was panicking, Evan turned to me.

“I don’t mind, but what do you think, Aria?”

To suddenly ask me that…

What am I supposed to say here…

I looked back and forth between Uriel and Evan, lost in thought.

I have a concept I’ve been maintaining, so it’s ambiguous to just call them comfortably, making it not easy to decide.

Of course, in my heart, I want to be more comfortable here, I want to get along well, but…

If I don't use the titles Brother or Sister, it feels awkward, doesn't it?

That's why I hesitate whether it's right to make the titles casual.

Still…

'I can't keep going on like this…'

If we're going to be together in the future, it would be good for us to get closer.

Maintaining the titles just to keep up the concept doesn't seem like a good idea.

It's ambiguous to even call it a concept in the first place.

Of course, I can't go as far as using informal speech, because all the image I've built up until now would collapse.

…

Wait a minute.

'Come to think of it, I did use informal speech with Evan, didn't I…?'

Oh, um…

Before returning here… that is, in the world within the Trial, I did use informal speech with Evan, but that was just a story within a dream.

And it wasn't like anyone else was watching, and I was only with Evan at the time, so I judged that there wouldn't be any particular problem.

But now it's different.

Now, not only Evan but also Stella and Uriel are with us.

If I drop the honorifics I've been using until now to not only Evan but also the two of them, it would seem strange… but if I only use informal speech with Evan, the two of them would obviously find it strange.

In that case, it would be better to just change the title and keep the honorifics as they are.

Then at least…

"[Evan…?]"

If I just call him by his name…?

I felt embarrassed after calling him, so I turned my head away without realizing it.

"Uh…"

Evan had a blank expression, as if he hadn't expected me to drop the honorifics and call him by his name right away.

…

Still, he's the Hero who will save the world, so I wasn't going to say this, but seeing him like that, he seems so clueless… somewhat foolish.

Well, even in the game, he was a kind and deeply affectionate guy to the point where I thought he was foolish.

That's why I liked him.

"Looks like he didn't notice."

"I know, right."

"[Didn't notice? What are you talking about?]"

Stella and Uriel were whispering to each other, so when I asked them what they were talking about, the two of them were startled and made excuses

that it was nothing.

I mean, I was just asking because I was really curious, but why are they reacting so excessively?

These guys…

I don’t know what they were talking about, but judging from their guilty expressions and gestures, they were talking about something they couldn’t be proud of.

‘Could it be…?’

Are they starting to get jealous of me showing affection by using informal speech with Evan?

Hmm, I think it’s possible.

Until now, I’ve been giving off a feeling of distance, but now they’ll feel very close, so if they like Evan, they would feel that I, who always put up a wall, have loosened up a bit.

In that case, it’s not strange for them to feel jealous.

Well, maybe not.

Actually, that’s a story that doesn’t matter to me.

“… Right! We need to go back quickly…!”

Evan shouted as if he suddenly remembered something.

It will feel dreamy, like something that happened in a dream, so even if he remembers what happened there, it will be a bit incomplete…

But at least he will definitely remember that he spent a long time there.

So it seems he felt the need to properly check how much time has passed since then.

At Evan's words, Stella and Uriel tilted their heads as if asking what he was talking about, but before they could even talk to us, Evan took off and ran.

"E, Evan?!"

"W, wait up~!"

W, wait a minute.

Take me with you too.

I may be the Saintess, but I've hardly ever exercised, so I can't keep up!!

Aaaagh!

"… Huh?"

"Huff huff… Why are you so fast…"

"That was good exercise~"

"…"

I collapsed…

No, I feel like I'm going to collapse…

I feel like I'm going to collapse any minute, but I'm somehow standing up…

I realized I was back, feeling the exhilaration of running as if my breath was about to be cut off for the first time in a while.

I didn't expect to realize it this way.

"No way… Not even a day has passed…?"

Evan seemed surprised that no time had passed.

Well, of course.

If time passed while we were taking the Trial, that would be more of a problem.

If it was like that in the game, taking the Trial itself would have been very difficult.

Anyway, time keeps passing in the game, and to see the high score by doing things according to the schedule, you have to do this and that as quickly as possible.

In the midst of that, the Trial, which is one of the essential elements that allows you to see the high score and takes the longest time, makes time pass?

That's just telling you not to play the game.

"I don't know what Evan has been talking about since earlier…"

"What do you mean time hasn't passed?"

"You guys… Don't you remember what happened in the Trial?"

"What happened in the Trial…"

"Ah, that…"

The two of them had a thoughtful expression for a moment, then shook their heads.

"There are parts I remember, but I don't remember exactly what happened."

"Me too. Ah, but I think I remember having fun together as a group of four!"

Uriel said that with a bright smile.

At that, Evan had a complicated expression and scratched his head.

“That’s… I guess it’s because I’m the Hero… I remember most of what happened there.”

“Hmm…”

“Could it be…?”

“Uh… We were in the Trial for about 2 weeks.”

“2, 2 weeks?!”

The two of them were shocked by Evan’s bombshell statement.

Then, Evan began to explain what kind of world it was and what kind of life they had spent during those 2 weeks.

After hearing all the explanations, the two of them finally had confused expressions.

“Did they twist the timeline…? Or if not, another dimension entirely…?”

“Ugh… I’m dizzy…”

I quietly thought, looking at the two people who seemed to have changed a lot.

‘Trial… I need to be careful in the future…’

Their personalities have changed too much.

1 - The Sacred Object of Water

"So, is everything we needed to do now finished?"

"I think so."

Stella answered Uriel's question.

It felt like we had been here for quite a long time, but in reality, we hadn't been at the beach for that long. After all, we came to the Trial Dungeon as soon as we arrived at the beach… So, when you think about it, it was as if we had just arrived.

We spent a long time, a whole two weeks, in the Trial Dungeon, so it felt like a long time for us, but for the two of them, it was probably like walking into the Trial Dungeon, falling down below, taking a nap, and then waking up to find the Trial was over.

Anyway… we solved the Trial… and we've done almost everything we came here to do, so all that's left is to have fun and go back to the academy.

No… was there still something left?

'Come to think of it, I didn't get the Relic.'

The Relic was still there.

Now that the Trial was over, all that was really left was to find the Relic that was sleeping somewhere here.

Like other Relics, the Water Relic was also in a location that an ordinary person could search for a lifetime without finding.

You could say it's in a location that's hard even for adventurers to find, hidden so well that it's almost impossible to find unless you have incredible luck or are naturally guided.

Of course, even if you're a Saintess, the Goddess wouldn't directly tell you the location of the Relic.

Of course, from the Goddess's point of view, she wants to help defeat the Demon King, but the Goddess can't interfere beyond a certain point… Well, that's how game settings are, but how would the people of the lower realm know that?

'That doesn't matter to me, who knows all the hidden pieces.'

If they ask how I knew, I can just say that the Goddess guided me.

As I said before, if the Saintess says the Goddess told her, what are they going to do if they don't believe her?

The Goddess would want this too, for sure.

Anyway, hidden piece…

It feels like it's been a long time since I've heard that word.

In any case, most Relics are like treasures that are nice to have but not essential to defeat the Demon King, but the reality is a little different.

Of course, that's only in the story of the game.

This place has become reality, so to minimize damage and defeat the Demon King in an efficient way, the Relic is practically essential.

Only perverts who do concept plays or those who try to defeat the Demon King with the lowest possible stats without using such things would do such perverted plays.

There were even crazy guys who took advantage of the fact that they could still do damage and beat the Demon King for dozens of hours straight without rest, finally defeating him at level 1.

Those guys are the real deal.

Anyway, everyone worked hard in the Trial, so we should rest properly, get the Relic, and then go back to the academy.

Since another incident will break out as soon as we return to the academy, it would be good to get plenty of rest in preparation for that.

When we return this time, the last and largest incident as first-year students will break out.

.

.

.

In fact, Evan had been worried about the time and came to check what day it was, but after confirming that no time had passed since the Trial began, he became much more relaxed.

He took the opportunity to explain to Stella and Uriel, who were curious, what had happened in the Trial, reviewing what had happened during that time.

"Hmm… complicated…"

"Honestly, even I, who am explaining it, doubt whether I'm explaining it well…"

At the time, the Trial Dungeon directly provided the memories, so there was no problem living there, but now that we're outside the Trial, there's no need for those memories to remain.

Things that were common sense at the time are now only memories, so Evan seemed to be having a hard time explaining it.

But he seemed to have succeeded in explaining everything somehow.

"When I think about it again, it's absurd… we lived and acted like ordinary residents in a world completely different from this one…"

Stella had a curious expression, wondering what kind of device that ancient dungeon had, and was pondering what kind of magic it was, while Uriel smiled brightly, saying that she didn't know what had happened, but it was a pleasant memory.

Before entering the Trial Dungeon, Uriel seemed to be trying to maintain her authority as a princess to some extent, but now she was completely relaxed.

Was it because they lived there, regarding each other as close friends, even though it was a dreamlike situation?

I don't know either.

"[Excuse me, everyone… if it's not too much trouble, could you come somewhere with me?]"

"Where?"

I decided that it would be better to get the Relic quickly while the iron is hot.

Well… it's the same whether we get it now or later, but since we've rested enough in the Trial, it seemed better to just finish everything we need to do right now.

It's also more convenient, and if something goes wrong when we go to get the Relic, we'll have time to solve it and come back.

So, it would be best to go get it as soon as possible.

I was worried that they might want to go later, but fortunately, that wasn't the case.

Only…

"I'll go."

Evan said in a very serious voice.

His Thought-form flew straight and true, and I could feel his strong will to grant any request of mine.

It's embarrassing to say this, but every time Evan showed such a demeanor, the events in the Trial kept coming to mind, and I felt embarrassed.

Please, I wish he would treat me normally like he did before entering the Trial.

"[L, let's go…]"

Of course, Evan's actions will continue for a while…

Probably…

It wasn't as far away as I thought.

Well… it's in a place that feels like you can go to the Trial Dungeon and get the Relic at the same time, but even though these guys are usually very vicious, they're not vicious about things like this.

Of course, apart from that, finding the location of the Relic is virtually impossible unless you already know it.

I know the location because there was someone who spent their life playing the game and found it.

It's not like I can find everything.

If there was someone who spent more of their life on this game than I did, that person would have entered the game instead of me, but anyway, it's not like I can spend time finding everything, so I had to get help from other hardcore players.

Thanks to that, it was definitely good that I didn't have to waste time moving to other areas.

If I had tried to find this without knowing the location, I would never have found it.

"This is…"

The route is in the sea again, but… this is a little different.

There's a path hidden between the rocks that allows you to naturally walk into the sea.

The path is basically blocked, and it's so natural that it's no different from other rocks, so unless you know exactly where to go, it's almost impossible to find it by wandering around.

In most cases like this, people don't think it's worth trying to find it by data mining, so the guy who tried to find it with his bare eyes must have had a hard time.

"Aria is really amazing… how do you find places like this?"

"It's a mysterious place… I've never been to a place like this in my life!"

Stella said in an absurd tone, and Uriel made a fuss, saying that she had never been to a place like this before.

As they said, it's the place where the Water Relic exists, so the terrain here has been transformed by the Holy Power that has flowed out of the Relic for a long time.

I don't know exactly, though.

"Is this also… the Goddess's revelation?"

I nodded in response to Evan's question.

Well, they'll have to believe it.

It's not a lie, it's virtually impossible to find this place unless you've received a revelation. Of course, you could find it if you blew away this

area, but how could that happen unless there was a fight between the strongest beings in the world, or a war broke out in this area?

You can basically say you can't find it.

So…

"[… I found it.]"

I smiled with satisfaction as I looked at the hairpin placed on the altar in front of me, emitting a faint Holy Power.

I found it.

2 - The Nature of Water (2)

“So there was a place like this…”

Evan wore a surprised expression, saying he didn’t know a place like this existed.

Not only Evan, but Stella and Uriel were also in shock, saying they never imagined a Relic would be in a place like this.

I thought so too.

The fact that it was hidden in a place like this, undetectable, was quite astonishing.

If I didn't have the knowledge from the original story, it would have been impossible to come here in the first place.

If this place were easy to find, someone would have found it long before I did and taken the Relic.

The world is vast, but there are also many adventurers who travel around seeking treasures.

Even if they knew it was in this vicinity, they wouldn't be able to find it by trying to detect it with magic or Holy Power, as I said before.

‘Even now, I don’t know why the Relics that were said to have been lost a long time ago are in a place like this.’

Clearly, in the game, they were described as lost ancient relics, but usually, when something is lost, it's either with someone or hidden where no one can reach it.

But it's hidden in a well-made ruin of an ancient civilization, so it's just bewildering.

In the game, they probably wanted to create a slightly hard-to-find treasure, so naturally, the visuals had to match that feeling.

Since it was conceptually lost in the game, there's no need to question why it's hidden in this way.

Even if I questioned it, there's no way to find out why it's like this.

In fact, I'm the only one who knows that a Relic exists here, so how could anyone else know?

It's best to dismiss it as an unimportant fact and move on.

“So, this is the Relic?”

“[It probably is.]”

Unlike the Holy Sword, Relics don't inherently have a feature that distinguishes their owner.

Of course, the stronger the Holy Power of the user, the more power it exerts, but that doesn't mean it chooses its owner.

Frankly speaking, Evan could take it and use it with the Holy Sword instead of me.

Well, as I said, it feels like a treasure, so it was meant to be used by characters of all classes.

Of course, the merits of using it differ for each class.

And the one with the most definite merit is none other than the Saintess.

“[…]”

I used Holy Power to examine the hairpin in my hand.

I simply released a wave of Holy Power to check its form, but it accepted my wave, amplified it, and then emitted it again.

Thanks to that, or perhaps because of it, I can see waves occurring around the hairpin.

“[Shall we go back then?]”

Now that we have nothing else to do, let's go back.

Usually, places like this have something else hidden, but while playing this game, I never discovered anything else hidden inside.

If this reality is based on that game, then it's safe to say that there's no possibility of anything else being hidden somewhere here.

Instead of wasting time here, it would be better to go back quickly and enjoy the remaining vacation before returning to the academy.

Everyone nodded at my words to go back now.

I was worried that something might happen on the way here, so I suggested we go together… But honestly, what could happen just getting here?

Still, you never know.

We turned our backs on the ruins where the Relic was kept and moved our feet.

Making sure to return it to its original state so that no one could find it.

.

.

.

“I thought Relics would be hard to obtain, but this was unexpected.”

“Y-Yeah, I guess so…?”

“…”

Uriel and Evan subtly agreed with Stella's words.

- Goddess… Are you fully prepared to catch the Demon King in this generation…?

Even Estel was questioning whether this was right.

Indeed, considering that even she, who has lived as the Hero's Holy Sword for a long time, didn't know anything about the Relic, I think it's understandable that she finds it strange that I found it like this.

She might be thinking that if something like this existed, the previous Saintess should have been informed.

But well… I was only able to find it because it's me, but in reality, even if you kept wandering around this entire area, you wouldn't be able to find it.

In the end, finding it itself is difficult, so you can say it lives up to its name as a hard-to-find treasure.

It's a meaningless story since the Goddess didn't give a revelation to find it, and I simply found it because I knew where it was.

Even I find it absurd that I found it so easily…

“So, there's nothing else we need to do now?”

I nodded at Stella's question.

What else would we need to do?

We finished the Trial, found the Relic, which was one of the reasons we came here… We've finished everything we needed to do here, so there's nothing left to do.

So now what…

There's only one thing left to do.

“[Let's rest as much as we want before going back.]”

It's time to rest now.

When we return to the academy, that hellish schedule will welcome us again… And even if we adapt and get along well, a big incident will break out before long.

It would be best to play as much as we can before that happens.

Of course, since they don't know about that future, everyone is just smiling brightly at my words, happy about the fact that they can play from now on.

“Okay, let's go~”

“Ah… Wait for me, Stella!”

“I need to put on my swimsuit again…”

Ah, right, the swimsuit.

Come to think of it, if we're going to play at the beach, that means I have to wear a swimsuit again.

…

Suddenly, I don't want to play anymore.

I'll just sit somewhere and watch the others play instead…

I'll pretend to watch the others play while leisurely observing and thinking about how to use this Relic.

Well, anyway, it greatly helps in healing people, and it also increases efficiency so that my Holy Power doesn't run out easily.

It's an essential item for me right now.

So, I need to prepare in advance in case the moment to use it comes.

Not only does it increase efficiency, but it can also store some Holy Power, so I need to gradually leave some power in the hairpin.

As time flowed and flowed, how long has it been?

It's now time to return to the academy.

Stella, who was looking up at the huge building in front of her, suddenly sighed deeply.

“… To be honest, I didn't really want to come back…”

“Me neither…”

Evan sighed in agreement with Stella's words.

It wasn't that long of a vacation… Or maybe it could be seen as a long vacation for us, who spent two weeks in the Trial.

From my perspective, it feels like I've been playing for a very long time before returning.

If I feel this way, Evan must feel the same.

Anyway… The vacation that was disgustingly long only for me and Evan was slowly coming to an end.

We only came for vacation and now that we're going back to the academy, we'll essentially have to return to our original daily lives.

Everyone knows that they have to return to the academy, but they still seem to have a lot of regrets about playing until now, and they seem to have a lot of lingering feelings.

Of course…

“…”

After Evan saw the paladins giving him strange eyes, no, eyes that were trying to kill him, I don't think I'll be able to take him to the Holy Kingdom often.

Seriously, even though no one was there, he keeps saying that there's a strange aura flowing and he's being strangely obsessive.

There's no way I would like Evan romantically.

Anyway… Still, we had a pretty enjoyable time before returning, so it's understandable that they're feeling regretful.

Well, what can we do?

We're ultimately students of the academy, so we have to go back when the time comes.

I also have to go back to the Theology Department and return to my usual daily life.

Not only me, but Stella also has to research magic, and Evan and Uriel also have to train.

That's how we can defeat the Demon King someday, right?

I looked down at the hairpin.

I don't need it right now, but until now, I've only been testing it myself, and I've never directly used it on someone, so I think it wouldn't be bad to try using it this time.

‘Let’s work hard.’

There are only a few months left until the day of the attack.

Considering that they might launch an attack earlier because of me, there's even less time left.

I'll work harder to minimize the damage as much as possible… And I'll work hard to prepare so that I can catch the Demon King Army executives.

Definitely.

3 - The Sacred Object of Water

Several months had passed since I returned to the academy.

Fortunately, or perhaps I should say predictably, my expectation that nothing would happen until the final exam proved correct.

While some incidents were brought forward and triggered early due to my presence, I judged that the incidents planned for the exam were designed to exploit vulnerabilities, making it impossible to attack except on the day of the exam itself.

Even if they accelerated their plans, if those plans ultimately involved exploiting the gaps that arose when we started the exam, it meant they couldn't attack until we began.

That was the basis of my judgment.

And my prediction turned out to be accurate.

If they were going to attack sooner, they would have done so already. Despite the exam being so close, the academy remained peaceful.

"Hmm…"

Argen Isis, the headmaster of the academy, listened to my story with a serious expression.

This matter was too significant to be handled alone.

I tried to resolve things myself as much as possible, without involving others, and to prevent any harm. However, this particular issue was beyond my capabilities.

If I secretly stepped forward, I would only be throwing my life away. Even with my immortality, capture would effectively neutralize me, leaving the

academy to face a Demon King Army executive without me.

Furthermore, even if they succeeded in defending the academy from the demons, they would still need to rescue me.

Even if their attack failed, dragging me to the Demon realm and imprisoning me would be a successful raid in itself.

After all, neutralizing the Saintess, one of humanity's hopes, would be a significant victory for them.

However, even with that possibility, I couldn't stand by and let it happen, especially after the heavy losses in the game.

If I, the Saintess chosen by the Goddess, were to lead the world to ruin, I would have lost my powers long ago and failed.

And Argen knew this well.

If I were going to lose my powers, it would have happened already. So, I thought it best to risk some suspicion and ensure everyone's safety by facing the enemy at full strength.

And to achieve that, there was one person I needed to tell first.

That was Argen.

"...If that's true, we can't just stand by."

Argen Isis.

Informing her about the upcoming attack was the best I could do.

"[You believe me?]"

"You wouldn't say something like this if it weren't true. As the headmaster responsible for the safety of all students, I can't simply ignore such a story."

That was true.

Of course, they might consider my words trustworthy to some extent because it was me speaking.

If an ordinary student suddenly barged into the office and claimed that demons were about to attack, who would believe them?

Argen's belief in me stemmed from the fact that I was the 'Saintess' directly chosen by the Goddess and granted divine powers.

"I understand what you want to say. You want us to prepare in advance to minimize casualties, right?"

"[Yes…]"

"That's not difficult. But…"

Informing all the professors about this wouldn't be easy, Argen said.

Only then did I realize my mistake.

We hadn't yet caught the traitor within the academy.

Moreover, we didn't know how many had betrayed us. If we prepared, we needed to do so without alerting the demons. But what would happen if we informed the entire faculty?

While I couldn't be certain, informing them with the high possibility of a traitor among them could trigger an uncontrollable situation.

To prevent that, for now…

"I'm sorry for being so incompetent."

"[…That's not true. This is unavoidable.]"

That's right.

It was unavoidable, and she had no reason to apologize to me.

In a place where so many people lived together, how could we possibly find one or two traitors?

How could anyone find them without being a god?

She must be frustrated as well.

If the incident on the last entrance ceremony hadn't happened, she might have told all the professors about this.

That would have made things even more uncontrollable, so in some ways, it was fortunate.

However, considering that the best-case scenario was to inform everyone without traitors and have the faculty prepare, neither situation was ideal.

A mage is not a god.

Not even a great mage…

Not outside their own field, or even within their own field, were they worthy of being called gods.

I bowed to Argen.

"[…Please take care of it.]"

The best I could do now was to hope that she would prepare accordingly.

From now on, I would do everything I could.

I simply said I had to go and stood up, leaving the room.

"Haa…"

Argen glanced at the door and sighed.

She already had so much to do, and now a demon attack was imminent, leaving her feeling frustrated.

Especially… since the scale of this attack was said to be different, it was even more shocking.

A massive attack that could potentially cause casualties…

Even if the Saintess could exchange herself to save people, if their bodies and souls were too damaged or exposed to Demonic energy, even the Saintess couldn't save them.

Those were the words of the previous Saintess.

Many of the attacks on the academy so far had been anything but lucky.

Most of the time, the Hero and the Saintess had stepped up and resolved things on their own before she even had time to intervene.

However, as the headmaster, she couldn't keep letting those two handle everything.

They were still her students, after all.

She had to start preparing now.

'How…'

The first thing she needed to do was gather trustworthy faculty members.

Gathering those with a near-zero chance of betrayal and preparing discreetly, without alerting others, was the best course of action.

And not only that, but it was also good to be able to continue the counterattack.

If Aria, the Saintess, was telling the truth…

"Maleficent…"

Argen gritted her teeth.

The great mage of the Demon King Army who had been tormenting her since the distant past… Naturally, as a great mage herself, she had fought him many times.

She had even created spells specifically to counter him… She never imagined that their connection would last so long, even after hundreds of years.

But now that things had come to this, she had to do it properly.

She would crush him thoroughly so he couldn't cause any more trouble. How many generations had he been blocking them?

But this was the end.

She had already defeated one of the Demon King Army executives.

That Magic beast, which they had been unable to defeat for so long and had only managed to seal, was split in half by the rookie Hero with an unbelievable skill.

Even now, that attack… It was clearly an impossible feat for the current Hero, but that's why she could think of it as a possibility.

Perhaps… they could truly defeat the Demon King himself, surpassing the Demon King Army executives.

In the distant past, even the party of the Hero of Salvation, who was praised for saving the world, couldn't achieve the feat of defeating the Demon King.

And for that to happen, the roles of the people around the Hero were also important.

What she had to do.

What she had to do.

She finally knew what it was.

'Maleficent… I will definitely capture you.'

Argen's eyes, as she stood up from her desk, were filled with a strong will.

She would definitely capture him and resolve this frustrating feeling that Marira had, and that she had unknowingly carried… a feeling that even her past Hero party members didn't know about, a feeling that she would only feel from a rival.

This time, she would definitely capture that damned undead and Marira.

Argen secretly vowed.

1 - Confession

So, what tasks are left for me to do now?

I pondered for a moment, but nothing immediately came to mind.

Normally, requesting assistance from the Holy Kingdom would be a simple matter. However, the significance of this attack lies in catching the demons off guard. The moment I request support from the Holy Kingdom, the demons would realize we have information and likely avoid attacking or find a detour.

That would defeat the purpose.

Of course, one might argue that if they don't attack, isn't that a good thing? And that it's problematic for an academy, which exists to educate, to be attacked in the first place.

That's only seeing one side of the story.

It's true that if we avoid the attack here, we can safely move on. But let's remember that Maleficent, that lich, is supposed to be captured here.

Aside from me, no one else knows that Maleficent is supposed to be captured here, but the fact remains that his capture is virtually certain.

As long as that lich participates in this attack, he'll fight by exploiting weaknesses with Words of Power, piercing through the plot's loopholes.

Because he expends so much power in this attack, Argent will have difficulty helping from the second year onward. But by then, the kids will have grown significantly, so it shouldn't be a major issue.

That's what I intend to make happen.

But this attack is different.

In a way, it's a transitional period.

The story is that amidst the war breaking out in the academy, the demons are defeated, and in the brief moment after Maleficent is barely found and his connection to the Life Vessel is forcibly severed with Words of Power, the Hero finishes him off. In other words, Argent helps to barely capture Maleficent, who has been a long-time nemesis.

This is the first reason why he must be captured here.

If he isn't captured here, and we show that we're aware of the impending attack, causing him to slip away, the future will change so drastically that I won't be able to prepare for it, no matter how much I want to.

At least the main story needs to follow its course to some extent so I can prepare. Maleficent, one of the Demon King Army's executives, surviving and returning alive at this point would create an enormous butterfly effect.

It would be no different from losing my only advantage: knowing the future.

In order to safely create a peaceful world, maintain my persona, enjoy my blissful masochistic life, and then return, I can't let that happen.

And the second reason.

This opportunity is virtually the last chance to capture Maleficent.

Perhaps "last" isn't the right word, since he's never shown himself directly before, so there's never been a chance to capture him. But since we don't know when or where he'll appear in the future, this is definitely the last sure opportunity.

So, even if this opportunity is a bit dangerous, I absolutely can't give it up.

No, in the first place... even though it's dangerous, I'm facing it with complete preparations, so it's questionable whether it can even be called dangerous.

It would be more dangerous to be attacked without knowing anything. If preparing and inducing the opponent's carelessness before launching an attack is considered dangerous, then shouldn't we avoid subjugating the Demon King altogether?

It pains me to use the students as bait, but...

'The current situation isn't good enough to worry about every little thing...'

Failing to capture Maleficent would be a very painful blow.

I can be sure of that, if nothing else.

All the annoying elements shown in the game were due to that guy.

"... Sister?"

So, no matter what, I have to seize this opportunity to capture him and grow comfortably in the future, so I can grow strong enough to subjugate the Demon King before he revives and crush him.

"Sister!"

"[... Ah? Yes?]"

"Are you alright? I was worried because you didn't answer for a while."

I made her worry.

It seems she was worried because I didn't respond even when called in the same posture during prayer, of all times.

I smiled, saying I was fine.

Come to think of it, is it almost time?

"[Then I'll go to the confessional first.]"

I said that and moved my feet.

It's hard to say this, but confession, where I listen to other people's sins and apologize with them, is the easiest thing to do, compared to studying.

Well, I've never liked studying since long ago.

In the first place, I'm a Saintess, so do I really need to...?

'Hmm... it's a bit much if the Saintess is a dimwit, though.'

It's not that I'm bad at studying; I just don't want to do it.

Even during my school days, when I was forced to study hard by my parents, I managed to maintain fairly high grades.

But I prefer not to do it.

Thinking that to myself, I entered the ever-changing confessional and sat down.

About five minutes passed like that, as I organized my future plans and meticulously checked again to see if I had missed anything.

Creak

Someone opened the door and came inside.

I was hoping no one would come in, if possible.

Even if I was hoping that inside, I have to do my best since someone came in.

A priest must not be interested in who the other person is.

In the first place, it's wrong to blab to anyone about what the confessor confessed.

I've heard all sorts of stories while doing this, so...

I could see how many sins people commit in their daily lives.

But...

Even people who have committed sins that I think are a bit too much come to confession, which is quite something.

Is it because God actually exists?

"I have come to confess my sins."

The moment I heard the voice, my eyes widened.

In fact, confession usually involves listening to sins and apologizing to God.

There's more to it if you go into detail, but that's roughly how it works.

Well... the reason I'm suddenly bringing this up is nothing special...

'Why are you here?'

It's Evan.

No matter how I think about it, this voice is Evan's.

No, there's no way I wouldn't know.

'Why is he here...?'

Why on earth is he here?

No, why is he even coming to confession?

We've been together all this time, and I don't think he's ever done anything that would warrant confession.

Did he do something like that while I wasn't around?

"Recently... I went to the sea with someone I like and her friends."

Oh... right, he did.

It was to receive the Trial and get the Relic, but basically, it was supposed to be a trip for everyone to have fun.

We spent quite a long time in the Trial... but since we rested well in the Trial before returning, it was enough to say we went on a trip.

But someone he likes.

'I feel like this has happened before...'

I feel like I've heard Evan's confession before.

I tend to forget most confessions, so I can't remember if it happened or not...

Well, it's a trivial fact anyway.

"There... I saw the person I like wearing a swimsuit for the first time."

"..."

Oh... I see.

"I know I shouldn't have these feelings... but I couldn't take my eyes off her."

No, why are you doing this?

You're the Hero.

Are you allowed to come to the confessional and say these things as the Hero?

No, well, it's not a strange thing.

If I weren't the one on the other side, I wouldn't even know it was Evan, and since I wouldn't know Evan, I certainly wouldn't know that the Hero is

making a confession like this.

So, I know that Evan is talking without worry.

I know that, but...

Why today of all days, when I just happened to come into the room to do confession, did he come into the room I'm in?

It felt like a trick of fate.

"Vulgar as it was... I couldn't take my eyes off her, but I couldn't even meet her eyes and kept looking away."

An even bigger problem was what happened during the last Trial.

Before, I thought Evan liked either Stella or Uriel.

If my thoughts had continued as they were then, I might have been thinking, "Finally! At long last!" and my heart would have been in a festive mood.

But because of what happened in the Trial recently, I couldn't help but be suspicious.

The target he's mentioning about the swimsuit.

Could it be...

"...///"

Is he talking about me?

I couldn't help but have such suspicions.

...

I'm so embarrassed I could die, damn it...

"What should I do..."

I don't know either...

2 - Confession

What on earth is he thinking, bringing up a story like this?

What would he do if he found out that it was me he was confessing to? I don't understand why he's telling me all this.

Of course, there's a rule that priests who hear confessions should never be curious about who the person is.

But from the confessor's point of view, it's a different story...

Even if I found out, it's not like he's a complete stranger. He's someone I've known for a long time, someone who's going to be the Hero, and it's not easy to just listen to his story and ignore it.

Especially when it's not just any story...

'Is this... about me?'

If it were before,

Before receiving the Trial, I would have been happy and excited, thinking that he finally seemed to have a crush on Stella or Uriel.

Perhaps because I was also participating in the confession, it was generally conducted quietly, but there was one problem.

'I can't do this.'

I really don't think I can do this.

Since we communicate through Thought-form, most students were bound to realize that I was the Saintess.

I never really felt like they were avoiding me because I was randomly assigned to the confessional each time... but there were students who would ask if I was the Saintess as soon as they heard me speak.

But what would Evan do if he found out that the person he was talking to during such a sensitive conversation was me, someone he had been with all this time?

I'm not Evan, so I can't say for sure how he would react, but there's one thing I can be sure of.

'It's going to be hard to look each other in the eye...'

We wouldn't be able to look each other in the eye for a while.

Whether Evan avoids me or I avoid him, maybe we'll both avoid each other.

What should I do?

How can I keep him from finding out that I'm the nun hearing his confession?

I pondered for a long time.

"At first, I didn't really know my own feelings, but I found out by chance."

"..."

Somehow, I never really felt like he liked me.

Well, he was suspiciously interested in me, but since he was the Hero and I was the Saintess, I just thought it wasn't that strange for him to be interested in me.

But after going through the Trial and realizing that Evan liked me, or that I liked Evan, it became like this.

To be honest, I wanted to think that it wasn't like that, that it was just a setting in that world.

But since I knew most of the game settings, I could be sure.

The fact that Evan and I were in a relationship... meant one of two things.

Even though that was the only evidence, it was such solid evidence that I couldn't deny reality, even if I wanted to.

But isn't it a little funny?

'What's so good about a scrawny body like mine...'

To put it nicely, I have a doll-like appearance and am a beautiful girl, but there's such a big difference that people who prefer more mature women would call me a kid.

But instead of liking Uriel and Stella, who are much prettier and have much better figures, he says he likes me, so it's hard to understand.

How could he do that...?

Most of all, what's absurd and frustrating is my reaction.

In the past, I might have been a little surprised that a man liked me, but I wouldn't have been this flustered.

I would have thought, 'Well, maybe...' and might have been a little disappointed in Evan for liking a girl like this, but I wouldn't have shown any disgust.

But now, something...

Something is very different.

I'm showing a completely different reaction than I expected.

Even now, I would have tried to hide the fact that I was Aria for Evan's sake, but now it's different.

I'm so ashamed that I want to hide.

If the fact that I'm in charge of this confession is revealed, I might just get up and run away from this spot without lying.

That's how burdensome and embarrassing the situation is.

'Hoo...'

But if I get up and leave right now, I'll be treated like a weirdo.

No, the problem isn't being treated like a weirdo, but the moment I run out of here, Evan will open the door and check who I am.

Then wouldn't running away be meaningless?

I need to stay calm in times like this.

It was better to think about how to get out of this situation.

'Is there another nun around here...?'

Another... nun...?

At this point, I couldn't hear Evan telling his sins at all.

I was just sending out waves to find a nun to replace me.

Originally, the confessional was completely sealed off, so if an ordinary person tried to check with their eyes, it would be impossible to see who was passing by, but I was different.

Since I can't see anyway, I'm sensing the surroundings with waves, so I can easily see who's passing by beyond the wall.

I don't know if I should call this fortunate, but a nun who always greets me when she sees me was passing by here at that moment.

I didn't miss the opportunity.

"[Sister Meryl...!]"

I sent a Thought-form that could only be heard by the nun who was passing by.

"... Huh?"

Since the confessional is equipped with soundproofing magic to clearly distinguish between the outside and the inside, Evan won't hear that I called a nun.

Unless I open and close the door here very loudly, there's no way he'll notice.

I have to run away right now.

"[If it's not too much trouble, well, it is trouble, but could you do me a favor?]"

"Are you perhaps the Saintess? What's going on all of a sudden..."

"[I'm in the confessional right next to you, Sister Meryl.]"

At my words, Meryl was startled and turned her head to look at the confessional where I was.

Soon, perhaps because my voice was urgent, she asked what was wrong with a serious expression.

Okay... it seems like she's going to grant my request...

I'm a little scared that this story will leak out, but right now, the fact that I'm Aria being revealed is ten times more scary than the story leaking out and spreading rumors.

Anyway, that's it.

"[I'm really sorry to the person who's confessing to me right now, but I have to go somewhere for an urgent matter. If you're okay with it, could you take over this person's confession for me?]"

"Yes, yes?! But such a thing..."

"[... Please.]"

I know it's not a good thing to do.

But what can I do?

I want to say it's a lie, but if Evan really likes me, then he's telling me everything about what he was thinking and looking at when he saw me in a swimsuit, so I'd be lucky if I didn't commit suicide right away.

And that's not all.

He's been holding back all this time, and he's been telling me all sorts of things that he's been holding back, and the more I hear, the more dizzy I get.

To be honest, Evan will probably go about his daily life with a refreshed expression, but I'm worried about how I'm going to face Evan after hearing most of the story.

So please, let me escape from here...

I begged inwardly.

Fortunately, Sister Meryl soon felt that I was desperate, and sighed and said she understood, as if she couldn't help it.

Thank goodness.

Really, thank goodness.

"[I won't forget this favor... God will surely allow it.]"

"Is it that important..."

"[...]"

No, actually, it's not.

It's not, but I don't know what she's thinking, but she opened the confessional door quietly with a tense expression, as if she had been entrusted with a very important task.

"[Please...]"

I'm really sorry.

It's better for you to tell this story to someone else, Evan.

Of course, I've heard most of the story.

I left it to the nun and ran away from the confessional.

...

I'm alive...

Hoo...

3 - Confession

- Hmmm?

Estel, the spirit sleeping within the sword.

She was currently facing an entirely unexpected situation.

A spirit created under the Goddess's command, who had assisted countless Heroes over a long period and played a significant role in sealing the Demon King.

In fact, it was no exaggeration to say that all Heroes had grown significantly thanks to her, to the point where they could subjugate the Demon King.

However, one crucial fact remained.

That was none other than the Goddess making her a female entity.

And for her, who had to live a mostly dull life inside the Holy Sword except for her inherent duties for many years, the stories of the Heroes who appeared in each era were extremely interesting.

And the most interesting of all was…

'Sniff sniff… this is the scent of love.'

The love stories of humans!

Considering that women, in general, greatly empathize with love stories, laughing and chattering about them, it was only natural that she, of all people, would be interested in the love story of the Hero, who was practically her own son.

Especially since the other party wasn't some wicked woman, but none other than…

'Love with the Saintess!!'

Do you know the word 'cliché'?

Having spent a long time as the Hero's Holy Sword, it wasn't as if she had never seen such a case before.

Of course, as history flowed, it was common to see Heroes and Saintesses falling in love and going through various things.

She had seen humans sharing intimate moments quite often.

While some Heroes were conscious of her presence, others were so in love that they forgot she was even there, engaging in passionate love. At first, she felt envious, but then she became intrigued.

Soon, it went beyond that…

Yes, these people are commonly called 'hardcore pure love enthusiasts.'

'Oh… my, my… I knew Evan liked the Saintess, but…'

She hadn't considered the opposite at all.

Although he had entered the confessional, weapons were not allowed inside, and Evan was desperately trying to hide what sin he was confessing, so she couldn't follow him in, unfortunately…

The Thought-form coming from inside completely blew away her boredom!

The reason was that the person he had gone to confess to was none other than Aria.

Judging by her embarrassed appearance, it must be a sensitive topic, but trying so urgently to change to someone else was unlike Aria.

It was as if the Saintess, who had been like a stone statue until recently, had changed from a certain day… She had felt like something had changed a lot, but when exactly did it change?

After a moment of contemplation, Estel was able to recall when it had changed.

'Come to think of it, I did feel a strange sense of difference after the Trial last time, didn't I?'

She had been normal before the Trial, but after the Trial, she seemed to be avoiding Evan.

At first, she had simply thought nothing of it when Aria suddenly said she was going to confession, but the moment she heard a Thought-form directed at someone from inside, Estel's thought circuits started turning.

That urgent Thought-form, and the request to change.

If it had been the usual devout Aria, she wouldn't have been embarrassed by Evan, let alone noticed that the person she liked was talking about her; she would have continued the confession as usual.

Since she couldn't write, she could only communicate through Thought-form… After one confession, rumors would spread that the Saintess was there.

But now, since it was her first confession after returning after a long time, there was no way she could know who was inside.

Especially since her first confessor was Evan.

'What a coincidence…!'

Even more shocking was…

That she, the Saintess, clearly knew that Evan liked her!

In fact, this was the most shocking thing of all.

She thought Aria would definitely not notice.

She was a child who knew nothing about love, so even if someone looked at her with loving eyes, there was no way a child who couldn't see or hear would know, and she had never experienced anything that would make her realize love.

At least, that's what Estel knew.

That meant she had experienced something that made her realize love without her knowing.

'Something must have happened during the Trial.'

Otherwise, there was no way to explain the current situation.

'Hmm… I guess I have no choice but to ask Evan?'

It's not like she's asking about anything else, just what happened during the Trial, so Evan wouldn't find it strange.

Rather, it would be stranger if he found it strange for the Holy Sword to ask about what happened back then!

Hmm!

…

Asking in detail, and privately, is a bit strange, but.

Above all, she had already asked him once, so it felt a bit awkward to ask again.

Back then, Evan had simply replied that it was a Trial to ask about his will to subjugate the Demon King while living in a happy world where everything had been achieved.

There was no way she could have known anything from that, right?

She didn't know about this situation back then, so she let it go, but seeing Aria's unusually conscious behavior towards Evan made her suspicious.

'Was I not interested enough…?'

She had fallen down not long ago and got up again, and the Trial was already over…

She was curious, but she didn't ask in detail because he didn't seem to want to talk about it much.

This won't do.

She'll have to hear it directly from Evan.

'I'm sorry for tempting an innocent child, but…'

What can she do?

This is how they grow up!

She might even be able to help their relationship progress!

"Hoo…"

- Evan~!

"Hheok?! E, Estel?!"

As soon as the confession ended, Evan was startled by Estel's sudden voice and asked what was wrong.

- So, what sin did you confess?

"T, that's… I told you I can't say…!"

- Hmmm? Well, just by looking at your embarrassed face, this older sister can tell, you know?

"... Oh, try saying it."

Hoo, this guy,

Is he challenging me to a battle of pride right now?

Estel suppressed a laugh inside.

'Aren't you too cute, Evan?'

Once he's all grown up and experienced all sorts of things, there won't be any fun in seeing this side of him, which is sometimes a shame… The current Hero, Evan, has such a fresh feeling that it's so much fun to tease him like this.

- Okay~ let's see… What kind of sin would make the innocent Evan embarrassed and go to confession to be forgiven?

"...gulp."

- Love? Desire? Having thoughts about someone you like?

"T, t-there's no way?!"

Oh my, look at him.

His reaction is perfect.

Estel's cheeks were rising as if they were about to tear.

Anyone who didn't know her would think she was a demon.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, Estel was not currently in spirit form, so no one could see her like that.

- Is that so~? Then what sin did you commit~

"T, that's…"

- You can just tell me honestly, Evan. I know everything~

"..."

- I even know who you like?

"H, how do you know that?!"

- There's a way to know everything~

"You just heard the confession, right? Right? Tell me!"

- How could I hear… There's a magic Barrier in place, unless it's broken, there's no way I could hear it, no matter how much it's me?

"..."

This was true.

No matter how much she was the Holy Sword, there was no way she could hear the voices echoing inside the soundproof Barrier on her own.

She had only heard Aria's words earlier because they were Thought-form.

So, Evan, who had no idea about the inside story, wanted to suspect that she had heard the confession, but he couldn't because there was no evidence to call it that.

In a situation that was so frustrating, Evan wrung his head with both hands and groaned.

- I'll help you, Evan… Believe it or not, I've connected all the Heroes' loves in the past…?

That was a lie.

In fact, she had only enjoyed watching their agonizing appearances and had never given them any proper advice.

Of course, Evan, who had no way of knowing that, would have heard it like a Temptation from the devil.

Estel, who had lived for so long, might know a way.

After what seemed like a long time of contemplation, Evan finally…

"... Okay."

He had succumbed to the Temptation.

4 - Confession

- Wow… amazing…

“…”

Having heard the whole truth, Estel praised him with a pure and sincere voice, saying it was amazing.

“Are you teasing me…?”

- Of course not! Why would I tease you with something like this?

Of course, she wanted to tease him if she could.

Estel thought that teasing him here would be like losing an even sweeter fruit.

So, rather than teasing him right away, she thought it was more important to listen to all the details from Evan and give him advice, thus giving him the impression that he could trust her sincerely.

Even if it wasn't the case, she wouldn't mind Evan dating Aria. Rather than women who might betray him, she felt relieved that Aria would be with Evan for the rest of his life, and they were a well-matched couple as Hero and Saintess.

Of course, there's also the fact that she personally supports the couple.

Anyway… there's no couple as well-suited as the Hero and the Saintess of this era, whom she is in charge of.

Of course, even so…

‘Aria looks a bit young, though…’

Aria looked too young to be dating someone her age.

Of course, she knew they were the same age, and even though Aria was small, she wasn't so small as to be like a child, so it was okay, but Evan was still growing.

Aria was also growing, but at her age, being that height meant there was virtually no hope… In the future, Evan would be incomparably taller than Aria.

He was already a little taller than when he first entered the academy, so who knows what would happen when that time comes.

‘Well… that's not a problem… it's a problem they have to solve themselves.’

The real problem is something else.

‘What should I do?’

She said she would help, but Estel had only watched over them her whole life and had never directly stepped in to help, so when she actually tried to help, she already felt overwhelmed, wondering what kind of advice she should give.

It was the karma she had built up from trying to tease the young Hero.

‘Let's calm down… there must be a way.’

She hadn't heard the whole story yet, but she had heard to some extent what had happened inside.

‘To think such a thing existed…’

How much does that Saintess know, anyway?

No, there was something wrong with the question of how much she knew.

There was no way Aria, who had only lived for a dozen years, knew all of that, so in fact, all of this must have been knowledge that the Goddess had directly given to Aria.

‘I don't know why she's giving it to her now, but…’

The effect of the Trial was amazing.

Estel looked at the necklace around Evan's neck.

He said that necklace, which he had obtained in the Trial of Strength, had clearly been "inherited."

In fact, after obtaining that necklace, Evan unlocked the Hero's power at a speed that was incomparable to before.

Unlike the previous Heroes, who became stronger through years of travel, Evan, who was living a peaceful life despite the various major incidents that had occurred, unlocked the Holy Sword and used the Hero's power faster than any other Hero.

And…

‘That attack back then…’

Judgment.

That skill, which summoned a giant sword and slammed it down, was clearly a Hero's skill.

But it was strange.

‘How could he use it when it's not a skill that Evan can use right now?’

A skill that Evan could never use in his current state.

The fact that Evan didn't seem tired at all after using it was enough to raise questions.

She highly suspected that the necklace had helped in some way.

She didn't know what it was, but…

‘He said he didn't get anything from the Trial of Wisdom?’

But for some reason, Evan said that it was easier to draw out the Hero's power, and that he seemed stronger than before.

It could only be described as an amazing skill.

The story seemed to have gone off on a tangent, but to summarize, it was a Trial that used that amazing skill to create a new world that fulfilled all the desires that existed in the subconscious, and brought them there to live naturally.

The Trial was to test whether they could face the Demon King and bring peace to the world even after losing everything.

And in that Trial…

‘They were in a relationship!’

Unfortunately, they were aware that they were in a relationship, but they also knew their original relationship, so they didn't act like lovers at all.

But that was enough!

It was more than enough!

Thanks to that, although it wasn't intentional, it became an opportunity for Aria to realize that Evan liked her!

It was a story full of speculation, with the word "probably" attached, but there was something that could only be said to be almost certain.

The Trial was a world that fulfilled everyone's desires, and the fact that they were set up to be in a relationship was enough to know.

Aria had never been conscious of Evan.

She had never been conscious of him as a man, at least that's how he had always felt.

And Aria must have known that fact as well, and the fact that they became lovers in a place where everything was fulfilled meant that someone must have liked them.

In other words, it meant that Aria had noticed that Evan liked her.

There was no way such a setting could have been created otherwise.

‘So that's why she reacted like that~’

She had been expecting it to some extent.

As a hardcore romance enthusiast who had been imagining all sorts of things while watching countless loves for thousands of years, she couldn't help but know.

But after knowing the inside story like this, there was nothing more enjoyable than thinking about what Aria had done earlier.

‘Ah… how fresh.’

It had been a while since she had seen such a fresh sight.

Of course, they still seemed far from being together…

More than anything, unlike Evan, who clearly had feelings for Aria, it wasn't clear whether Aria liked Evan.

Of course, she must have some feelings for Evan to show such a reaction.

The question was whether she would be able to recognize those feelings… and if she did, whether she would be able to accept them.

And…

“So? I told you everything, Estel?”

‘Hmm…’

In the end, I didn't think about what kind of advice to give at all.

What should I do? Estel pondered for a long time.

If she just passed over it without saying anything, he might get sulky and not talk to her for a while.

How should she give advice so that Evan would take it seriously? After pondering for a long time, Estel decided that the only way to do it was to break through head-on.

- Before I give you advice, there's something I want to talk about first… Do you have any plans to confess to Aria?

“… Huh?”

- I mean… I want to give you advice, but you haven't defeated the Demon King yet. I'm asking if you intend to confess to Aria and date her in this situation.

Evan's eyes widened at Estel's words.

Come to think of it, that was right.

He hadn't been able to talk about it because he was ashamed, but Estel was right a hundred times over: what would happen if he confessed to Aria when he had so much to do?

“…”

- You need to think about this seriously. You can't abandon your duty.

“That's… right…”

Only then did Evan realize the reality he had been ignoring.

Had he become too complacent?

He had been spending time in a peaceful world with Aria for only two weeks, but it seemed like his head had gone crazy.

He still hadn't decided on the most important thing he had to decide first.

- Of course, I won't stop you from choosing either way. I'll support you whether you choose to do it before or after you finish your duty.

But she just wanted to say that if he was going to confess to Aria after defeating the Demon King first, then giving him advice now would be meaningless, Estel said.

"… Give me some time to think."

Evan, who had a somewhat sad expression on his face, said that and left.

Estel watched him go and let out a sigh of relief.

'I made a mistake…'

Actually, it's a story that doesn't matter at all.

For some reason, she felt like she was tricking an innocent child again, so she didn't feel good, but she couldn't help it.

She couldn't think of a way to get out of that situation.

More than anything, she didn't want to drag the story on seriously, but…

'Anyway, he has to choose.'

She had seen many Heroes who couldn't choose either way and ended up losing both and dying lonely, so it was advice she could give.

'Should I talk to the Saintess?'

She should think about advice as well, and it seemed better to do that.

Estel smiled as she made plans for the future.

5 - Confession

“I need to think seriously…”

Evan walked to a secluded spot and sat down, pondering the things Estel had said.

‘I thought it was too early, but…’

Hearing it directly made it feel even more real.

Isn't the world still threatened by the Demon King?

The reason he went to confession this time was ultimately to correct his relaxed mindset after spending two weeks peacefully in the Trial.

It was just that Estel happened to notice something was off and seriously questioned him about the Trial.

‘This won’t do.’

It was undeniable that he liked Aria, but he wondered if confessing now, before the world was at peace, would delay his growth.

He doubted whether he, who hadn't even alleviated Aria's pain, was qualified to confess to her.

‘Still…’

Wasn't it still a distant story?

The Demon King might revive at any moment, and if he focused too much on training, thinking the revival was imminent, he might lose Aria.

If it was already too late, would he regret it then?

Evan gritted his teeth.

He couldn't allow that.

Absolutely not.

Although he had been given the duty of a Hero, he was originally just a kid who picked up a sword after meeting his master.

Despite being suddenly burdened with the duty of saving the world, he hadn't refused and had come this far, even subduing that massive Magic beast, one of the calamities of the distant past.

Could he… rest a little?

He had vowed to defeat the Demon King, but he didn't want to do anything he would regret.

However, he couldn't abandon his duty either. From Evan's perspective, he couldn't give up either. He couldn't give up defeating the Demon King, but he didn't want to give up Aria either… That was his situation.

‘What can I do here…’

After thinking for a long time, Evan finally made a decision.

If he couldn't give up either, he would have to do both, even if it took a little longer.

But if he just let time pass without saying anything, he would lose this opportunity forever.

To hold onto both…

‘There’s only one way.’

Evan covered his face with his hands and sighed deeply.

“—Have you decided?”

Evan, who had returned, wore an expression as if he had made a “big decision.”

On the surface, it was advice to seriously choose whether to prioritize world peace or love, but Estel, who had intended to simply buy time, found it difficult to guess what choice Evan had made.

‘What is it…?’

Did he think about it seriously?

If he had decided to choose love, it was hard to imagine him making that face…

‘Did he put more weight on duty after all?’

It was a slightly disappointing choice, but…

Estel also felt a bit of regret.

But it wasn't entirely unreasonable either… In fact, as the Holy Sword, she had seen many who tried to escape because they loved each other too much.

The Demon King was so powerful that he was mostly sealed away, and even if he was defeated, the Demon King would inevitably reappear after a long time. It was like a law of this world.

Sealing him away would bring peace for longer than defeating him, but it couldn't prevent a similar being from appearing again.

‘It can’t be helped, but…’

It seemed best to postpone the fun and focus on helping Evan grow for now.

That's what Estel thought, but…

“I’m going to confess.”

Estel froze in place at Evan's sudden declaration.

“—Oh… really?”

She hadn't expected him to prioritize love so much…?

From Estel's perspective, choosing love was an incredibly enjoyable and good choice, but she was also worried.

Aria and Evan weren't the type to give up on subduing or sealing the Demon King and choose to escape, but…

‘Hmm…’

As she had said before, she had originally brought up this story to buy time, so she couldn't help but be taken aback by Evan's appearance, having made a decision in just one hour.

She had expected him to ponder for at least a day or two…

It was such a big issue.

Estel was sweating.

Of course, it wasn't like she hadn't thought about what advice to give.

It was just that it wasn't concrete, and…

‘Well… isn't the only way for a couple to deepen their relationship is to mate?’

Mating, or in other words, sex.

Frankly speaking, the humans she had been watching all along seemed to enjoy overlapping their bodies and doing this and that.

Having lived as the Holy Sword for thousands of years, she didn't know what was so enjoyable about it, but seeing them enjoy it made her wonder if Aria and Evan would do it too.

It was also called reproduction… and in reality, children were born from it.

‘Should I just tell them to do that?’

Although she had lived as the Holy Sword, she understood that openly talking about such things wasn't very appropriate, as she had lived for thousands of years.

Just from how extremely reluctant she was to be seen by others, she could understand that it wasn't something to be flaunted.

But the problem was that she wasn't human, so she didn't understand what kind of act it was or what kind of social image it had.

‘I don’t know.’

Anyway, now that Evan had decided, she couldn't tell him not to.

Estel herself was the one who told him to choose one of the two.

“—Then are you going to confess right now? Whether Aria accepts or not is a separate issue, but I think it's fine.”

“…Not exactly.”

Then what is it?

What was he talking about confessing for?

When Estel asked if he was saying something strange, Evan scratched his head with a flushed face as if he was embarrassed, and answered quietly.

“Well… I’m going to confess that I like her… but we have a duty to defeat the Demon King, so I’m going to ask her to wait until then…”

“—Oh… huh?”

“I’m going to promise to become a cool guy who is worthy of her by then. I’m also going to tell her that I want her to decide her answer by then…”

…

…

‘Oh my god.’

He ended up choosing both after all.

It might be a very difficult thing for both of them.

For Aria and for Evan… but it was definitely a choice that allowed them to hold onto both without letting go.

“—…Alright. That should be enough.”

“So, um…”

“—Huh?”

“Will you help me become a man worthy of Aria, Estel?”

“—Heh…”

No way.

Are all Heroes this pure?

Later on, they would eventually be weathered by the storms of the world, and their pure appearances would disappear, and they would be busy living blatant lives.

Well… of course, they were chosen as Heroes because they were pure…

Although they were chosen by the Holy Sword, strictly speaking, it wasn't her who chose them, but the miracle bestowed upon her that chose them, so Estel was going crazy seeing the pure Hero after so long.

‘Let’s work hard…’

I have to work hard to see this pure appearance for longer.

That's how Estel felt.

.

.

.

“[…Pardon?]”

“Well… I have something to talk about, so I was wondering if you could come out for a moment.”

Evan approached and asked after I had finished my confession time and was resting for a while.

…

Huh.

Could it be that he found out that I had confessed?

It wasn't impossible.

I was too flustered at the time… Of course, it's hard to believe that I, who has been operating Thought-forms for so long, would make such a basic mistake of missing the target.

The Thought-form itself moves like my limbs, so it's not that difficult to concentrate and send it to only one person.

Most people can't notice it unless I directly send it through my head.

If he could figure that out, he would either be sensitive to Thought-forms or…

‘Someone who can operate Thought-forms…’

Evan wasn't that type.

Anyway, the fact that he's calling me is a fact.

‘T, this is bad…’

I'm already feeling complicated because Evan likes me, but if Evan finds out that I heard all those stories through confession…

Maybe this relationship that is barely being maintained will break down. That's the anxiety I felt.

‘Haa…’

It's so hard to keep up with the concept.

When will the day come when I can comfortably enjoy the pain?

I shouldn't say this as a Saintess, but Maleficent, won't you attack soon?

It's too peaceful these days.

Really.

6 - Confession

Anyway, I couldn't refuse since he had something to say.

Not that I had any reason to refuse.

'What should I do...'

I wish he would bring up something completely different from what I'm thinking right now.

Just the fact that he approached me right after I confessed and started talking to me, it can only be explained by him realizing that I was the one who took his confession.

Bringing up a different topic is practically wishful thinking.

What a sad story...

'Ah...'

He's not going to apologize and confess right here, is he?

I don't think Evan would do that based on his personality, but if I were to receive a confession here, I have no idea how I should respond.

If I reject him, our relationship so far will be ruined, so I can't just accept it happily... but accepting it is also a problem...

'It's not that I dislike Evan...'

I actually like him.

It's just that it's friendship, or camaraderie... the feeling of seeing my favorite character, seeing the protagonist... something like that, not a romantic feeling as a man to a woman, which is the problem.

There is a way to endure and date him to defeat the Demon King, but... that would hurt Evan too much.

The situation would escalate to the worst, to the point where all the sacrifices I've made to have these romantic relationships would become meaningless.

I can't stand to see that happen.

I'd rather try to genuinely love Evan than do something like that, it's crazy.

It's not like I'm trying to destroy the world...

'If the world is destroyed, I can't go back...'

Even if I come to genuinely like Evan, I doubt I'll be able to return.

'Ah... how did it come to this...'

My original plan was to guide Evan to like Stella or Uriel, or another heroine who might come along.

But for some reason, instead of liking those two, he's telling me that he likes me...

And to make matters worse, I even found out about it.

I was hiding it pretty well, but it's not easy to hide what's in your heart, so it was revealed during this Trial.

It's unfortunate for Evan, but if he confesses here, wouldn't it be better to reject him with a heavy heart?

'No matter how I think about it, that seems like the best option...'

Because there are other better people... I'll try to persuade him that liking me, who could die at any moment, is a loss.

'Persuading him like this never works...'

In movies, novels, and animations, when you ask someone why they like someone like me, they always give all sorts of reasons and try to express their love somehow.

Even I think that if I keep putting myself down and telling him not to like me, to like someone else, he'll want to cherish me more...

But what can I do when it's actually true?

The reason I'm acting as the Saintess and adopting this persona is not because I have a preference, but to defeat the Demon King in the most efficient way possible without causing any harm and return home.

Right.

Since they said they would grant my wish... it's practically inevitable that I will disappear from this world when I return home.

Well, failing to defeat the Demon King and dying here is also disappearing, so it can be called inevitable.

Anyway, either way, I have to disappear by the end of this story, but if we're in a relationship where we like each other, wouldn't that be impossible?

I didn't want to create such a relationship.

If I go back, we'll never see each other again, so it would only hurt Evan.

'It's complicated...'

The current situation is too complicated for me...

As I walked to a secluded place to talk to Evan, I sighed inwardly.

"...This should be good enough."

"[Ah... so we're going to talk here?]"

"Yeah, is it okay?"

"[Yes... please tell me.]"

Well, maybe everything I've been thinking so far is just wishful thinking.

Maybe there's really something else going on and he simply called me out for that reason.

However...

"Well... um... I mean..."

He kept stuttering, struggling to say something, and started to wonder if he should say it or not.

If he's going to struggle like that, why did he call me out... I felt a little doubtful, but that doubt made me feel even more uneasy.

One of the things that's hard to talk about to someone is what I experienced this time.

'Could it really be...?'

That's why I can't help but be suspicious.

If it's something that's so hard to say, isn't it about him mentioning to me all the things he confessed about lusting after me?

Cold sweat trickled down my back.

Anyway, as I said before, nothing is certain until Evan starts talking, so it's better to listen to what Evan has to say and then judge.

If I jump to conclusions, I might be misunderstood as liking Evan... or something like that.

Wouldn't it be better to pretend I don't know anything...?

Thinking that, I stood still in place until Evan started talking.

Evan, who had been unable to speak for a while, finally opened his mouth.

"Well... this might be sudden, but I called you out because I have something to say..."

"[...]"

Why are you being so serious about it...

If you're going to be so serious about it, it must be true...?

The cold sweat trickling down my back started to increase.

"You might have already noticed..."

Ah.

Uh oh.

Uh oh oh.

"I like you. Aria."

Why are you confessing so suddenly, you crazy bastard!!!

I did it.

I ended up doing it.

Now that I've come this far, there's no turning back.

'I've never seen Aria make that kind of face before...'

She always had her eyes closed and a gentle, subtle smile on her face, but the expression she's showing now is a little different.

It's like...

'That face from back then...'

Was it during the Trial?

The first time Aria showed me her eyes.

That's when I first saw Aria's eyes.

Aria's eyes that shone blue, her lively appearance...

That expression she showed when she saw a beautiful scenery came to my mind.

I don't remember it well, as if I was dreaming, but perhaps because Aria's faint smile was so impressive.

It's like I don't remember it well, but when I see Aria's face, it seems like I remember it well.

"[You... like me...?]"

"As a man to a woman... I love you."

"..."

It's been almost a year since we met.

It hasn't been that long, but in that short time, Aria has become an unforgettable... indispensable existence for me.

It's all thanks to Aria that I was able to come this far.

But...

"But I'm not confessing to get an answer right now."

"[...?]"

What does that mean?

Aria tilted her head.

It's understandable that it sounds strange.

If I was confessing until just now and suddenly say that I'm not confessing to get an answer right now, anyone would react like that.

I chuckled inwardly at Aria's cute appearance and started to talk.

"We have a duty to defeat the Demon King right now. Confessing and dating each other during this time, or confessing and being rejected... I don't think either would be a good thing."

So I was planning to postpone the answer.

"I want you to think about the answer until I defeat the Demon King... I'll definitely become a man who is worthy of you."

After finishing everything I wanted to say, I took a breath and looked at Aria.

Aria's face, after hearing all my stories, was blankly facing me.

I don't want to hear the answer right now.

Is that why?

"...Then, I, I'll go!"

After finishing all the stories I wanted to say, I just left the words that I'll be going now and ran away from the spot.

'This doesn't feel right...'

Even as I ran away from the spot, I was filled with regret, wondering how I would face her in the future, whether I could talk to her properly.

I didn't want to confess like this.

I wanted to say that I'll be waiting for the answer in a cooler way and leave the spot coolly.

'I don't know...'

Haa... I'm such an idiot...

Aigo...

Confession (Intermission)

What on earth is he talking about?

I stared blankly at Evan's retreating figure, already gone from his spot.

It felt like a typhoon had struck and passed in an instant.

'Uh...'

So...

He does like me, but he has a duty to defeat the Demon King and save the world, so he wants me to think about my answer until he defeats the Demon King?

And all that stuff about becoming a man worthy of me... I didn't think he'd actually wait until then?

'Does he even understand what he just said...?'

In my old world, it's like saying, "I like you, but the country calls, so I have to go to the army, so I'm confessing now. Please think about your answer until I'm discharged, and please wait for me until then."

In a novel, there's nothing more romantic than this situation, but unfortunately, the difference from reality is that we're in a life-or-death situation right now?

No, not necessarily.

Going to the army is like risking my life to protect the country, so it's foolish to weigh the two differently.

If I had to compare, the army is about leaving to protect my country and my people, while the Hero's journey is about protecting this world itself.

Anyway, the fact that he confessed to me in a situation where it could take a year, five years, or even ten years is already amazing.

It's a bit much to say, but Evan is handsome, and he's pure and kind, so there wouldn't be a woman who wouldn't fall for him.

Frankly, if I were an ordinary woman in this world, I would have fallen for Evan's words and continued the exciting wait.

Unfortunately... if the other person wasn't me.

'Evan...'

I thought of Evan, who had already left, and felt sorry for him.

I don't want to hurt Evan... but if I have to live in this world forever, maybe I'll consider it.

Of course, it's only because Evan has saved me several times that I have some feelings for him, but I don't know if I'll actually date him or not.

At least, I don't have any strong aversion to being friends with him for life...

I sincerely want Evan to be happy.

Stella and Uriel, and the characters who are going to join in the future, too.

But...

'When all this is over, I have to go back to my original world.'

That was the problem.

I was planning to return to my original world after defeating the Demon King.

That's why I hoped Evan wouldn't like me and sincerely wanted him to be with Stella and Uriel.

Because I thought that even if he liked me, we were destined to never be together.

And it's also uncertain whether I can like Evan or not.

Of course, if I have to like Evan to make this world peaceful and for me to survive, I have no choice.

A situation where neither is certain.

If I could make a wish to return to my original world after defeating the Demon King, I would probably make that wish?

I would have been sure of it in the past.

In the alley where Evan disappeared, I sighed and looked up at the sky.

Even if I looked up, I couldn't see anything, but for some reason, I desperately wanted to see the sky.

'Ah... I was more comfortable in the Trial...'

Really.

To be going crazy now, I'm such an idiot.

I can't see anything.

I can't hear anything.

This alone is too much stress for me.

Is this how frustrating a disability is?

If you were born without it, you wouldn't know the inconvenience of not having it, so it might be better.

I'm not belittling the inconvenience of people with congenital disabilities.

Of course, they must be as hard as I am.

But... they probably don't know how much despair comes from losing something you originally had.

This feeling of not being able to see or hear anything, like being trapped in a dark box.

The feeling of never being able to see the world or hear the sounds of the world again.

I wanted to go back like that.

To where I originally lived... to my original self.

Surely, that's what will happen.

Life after that wasn't much different from before.

Of course, Evan, who was full of embarrassment because of his confession, kept avoiding me.

I don't know if I should be glad about this, but Evan didn't seem to know that I was listening to all the stories in the confessional.

Well, if Evan had found out that I had heard all the stories, he wouldn't have been so quiet.

If it were Evan's personality, he would have come to me and made excuses that he didn't mean those things.

Or maybe not?

He might think that I'm pure, so I don't know much about that, so he might think it was nothing and move on.

I'm not Evan, so I don't know what kind of judgment he'll make, but one thing is for sure, most of the thoughts looking at me are probably that I

don't know much about the relationship between men and women.

It's weirder if I know.

There's no one to teach me, and there's no way to find out, so there's no way I'd know how men and women do this and that to have a baby.

Well, to keep the concept, it's better to pretend I don't know anything.

'Call me a monster obsessed with concepts...'

But I don't want to show a strange side.

It's not like I've never shown anyone that I enjoy suffering.

It would be the end of the day if I showed that I was smiling and enjoying the pain, let alone if I was caught knowing about sex.

So, I continued to act while treating other people.

In the past, I sometimes failed to act, and people looked at me strangely, but at that time, I was so seriously injured that I thought I was a little out of it and moved on.

But every time, I felt too burdened by the gazes looking at me.

I don't make those mistakes now.

I've been living this life for so long that I'm really used to it now.

It's not for nothing that I'm desperate to find new stimulation.

"[Hoo...]"

I don't know how they do swordsmanship training, but so many people come to me.

Fortunately, it's not a real sword fight, so only kids with broken bones or something come.

Personally, the pain of breaking a bone is very painful, so it's a kind of enjoyable, everyday happiness for me.

On the outside, I tell them to work hard because it's for you to become stronger, and if you think you're hurt, don't hesitate to come anytime.

I'm not sure if I made a mistake, but it seems like people don't come as much since I said that, so I'm a little disappointed.

"[I'll be going now, Sister.]"

"Ah, yes... Yes! Thank you for your hard work, Saintess!"

The Theology Department doesn't do much.

How little is there to do that it's no different from when I lived in the cathedral before.

I think I talked about this last time.

"[Not much time left.]"

There's really not much time left now.

The academy's exam.

And...

'Maleficent.'

The chance to catch and kill that bastard.

I've already made all the plans.

I have to be sure to do it without making any mistakes, but I've worked hard so far, and I have these Relics, so there's no problem.

Ah... of course, Maleficent's resistance might cause some PTSD to other people.

'I have to do it in a place where there are no people...'

I should ask Argent about this separately.

She wouldn't want to show my friends a side that's not good for their mental health, either.

Neither do I.

"[Evan...]"

How should I answer?

It's probably a long way off before I give that answer.

But to give an answer that Evan can be satisfied with, I should start thinking about it now.

I smiled bitterly and moved to my dormitory.

"Oh, Aria, you're here?"

Stella, who was studying magic, greeted me when I returned to the room.

I'm sorry to Stella, but I wanted to lie down on the bed right now, so I answered quietly and went to the bed and lay down as if collapsing.

Stella asked me if I was okay and if I was sick, but I just said I was okay and curled up.

It's difficult.

Really...

1 - Last Exam of the First Year

A few weeks had passed since then.

I spent my days still in the Theology Department, as if I were living in the cathedral every day.

In fact, during that time, I continued to practice healing using Relics as well as my original abilities.

Unlike directly using my power to heal people, using Relics to heal someone didn't damage my body.

Of course, it would if the level got too high, but basically, Relics contained the power to heal someone, and they could even hold my Holy Power...

It wasn't my preferred method, but I had to use it to practice using Relics.

It was a disappointing time, but I had completely mastered the use of Relics, so it wasn't a bad harvest in its own way.

It was good to maintain my concept and enjoy myself, but what I had to prioritize above all else was catching Maleficent while minimizing damage.

But no matter how much I prepared, there would inevitably be victims when the incident occurred.

Of course, even if there were victims, I would save them all, and Argent would step in to prepare, so it would be less...

My goal was to reduce the number of people who died as much as possible.

I had been practicing hard with that in mind.

Time flowed on.

Finally, the Trial day arrived.

"[Sister Stella? Wake up.]"

"Ugh... I'm awake..."

What should I do with this sleepyhead?

I clearly told her to go to bed early because tomorrow was the Trial, but she ignored my advice, saying she would soon get meaningful research results.

In the end, she couldn't wake up properly even on the morning of the Trial.

I can't believe it.

She's in a position where she has to maintain the highest grades possible to get a scholarship and continue living in the dormitory because she doesn't have money.

I sighed deeply.

But I couldn't leave her like this. It was like borrowing energy, so I shouldn't use it too much, but...

I had no choice on a day like today.

I gave Stella a Fatigue Recovery Blessing.

"Ugh...?"

Stella, who received my Blessing, stirred for a moment and got up.

Her eyes were still full of fatigue, but she was much better than before when she couldn't even get up.

"What... I had a hard time getting up a while ago, but now I'm less sleepy..."

"[That's because I gave you a Blessing. You have to get up and go take the Trial quickly.]"

"Ah... right... that was today...?!"

She seemed to have completely forgotten because she was so focused on magic research.

I should have known when I told her yesterday that it would be good to go to bed early, but she said she was sorry because she had to focus on research.

"[You might not be able to take the Trial if you're late.]"

"Ugh...!"

Stella, who made a shocked expression at my words, jumped up and said she would get ready soon.

I sighed as I watched Stella enter the bathroom, but I couldn't help but smile, thinking that she had become much more active than before.

Seeing this, it seemed that the Trial wasn't all bad.

She had become a little brighter since she became friends with me, but not to this extent... and she had become close to Uriel rapidly.

Of course, it was also very comfortable to live there...

I didn't think there was anything particularly good about it other than that, but seeing Stella and Uriel's changed appearances...

'I like you, Aria.'

"Ugh..."

What am I thinking again...

Evan's appearance should clearly look like a normal 3D model to me now, but is it because I saw Evan's bare face for quite a long time during the Trial?

The events in the Trial still felt like a dream, but I felt strange because Evan's confession to me at that time was vividly recalled.

'Why is my heart so complicated...'

I wondered if I had really become strange, seeing that the memory of Evan confessing to me kept popping into my head.

"Aria? Aren't you going to wash up?"

"[Ah... I'll go.]"

I should think about it after washing up.

I thought it might get a little better if I thought about it while washing up.

The last Trial of the first year.

This time has already come...

"Hey, they say we have to wear this."

"What is it... a bracelet?"

"Didn't they say we're taking a written test first today?"

"Isn't it for preventing cheating?"

As soon as we arrived at the academy, the teaching assistants handed us something.

When I checked, it looked like a bracelet.

"Hmm... magic is applied, but the level is so high that I don't know what kind of magic is applied..."

Stella was trying hard to interpret the magic circle written inside, but it seemed difficult for Stella's level yet.

It was the first time I had seen Stella hit a wall like that.

How great of magic did they put in?

'It's unnatural.'

It was obvious that this was a bracelet to prepare for Maleficent's attack.

While I was expressing my doubts, a voice came from the bracelet.

- The bracelet you are given now must be worn throughout the Trial period to monitor your safety and prevent cheating. It will not work outside of the Trial hours, so you don't have to worry about invasion of privacy.

- The jewel of the bracelet is designed to light up while it is working, so there will be no confusion.

'Ah... this is it.'

I was half-doubtful at first, but I think this is it.

I couldn't help but be suspicious just by the fact that they were using it now after not using it until now...

'Maleficent's side won't suspect this.'

There's no room for suspicion.

There are many magic that students can't identify, but that's natural because the person who used the magic was none other than Argent.

I heard that using this bracelet during the Trial has been confirmed since before, and they added elements to prepare for Maleficent, so there was even less to worry about being suspected.

The voice coming from the bracelet seemed to be heard by other students as well as me.

The students who had been questioning what it was a while ago had disappeared.

Then it's almost time.

I got up from my seat.

Stella, who saw me trying to move somewhere, asked me where I was going, expressing her doubts.

"[I have someone to meet for a while. I'll be right back.]"

I was thinking of having a final conversation just in case.

Stella was wondering who I had to meet at this time, but she soon thought so and carefully said to me.

"Um... do you have to come back quickly?"

It's hard to say this, but I think she's become cuter than before.

Despairing once again that I couldn't see this cute version of Stella with my own eyes, I greeted Stella as if nothing was wrong.

"[Of course.]"

With the answer that I would definitely be back soon.

After leaving the classroom, I looked around to see if anyone was following me, and then headed to the Dean's office alone.

I thought he would have done it well even if I didn't check it, but...

It's good to meet him in case something happens, right?

Thump.

"Oh? You're here."

As soon as I arrived, he turned around and made eye contact with me as if he had been waiting.

Of course, I can't see.

"The preparations have already been made. If you activate the magic circle prepared in the bracelet, all the students will be evacuated. You're wearing it well, too, right?"

"[You mean this bracelet that you told us to wear for the Trial?]"

"Yes, that's right. It creates a shield that can protect the students to some extent in case something happens. These artifacts are less efficient, but my shield Barrier can greatly increase the efficiency. It will be able to block most attacks."

"[Wow...]"

"Not only that, but Teleportation magic that activates when I send a signal is also applied. Even if Maleficent attacks, no students will die."

He seemed to be very busy these days, so he was making these things.

He was making bracelets for each and every student... I could see how much he cared about the students.

"[Can I take off this bracelet in the middle?]"

"I want you to keep wearing it if possible, but..."

"[It's impossible to catch him without me.]"

It can't be helped.

Argent asked me with a pitiful expression.

"Are you really okay...?"

Am I okay?

...

I was okay.

Rather, I was happy, and I didn't think it would be difficult.

Just...

"[Don't worry about me. You have to prioritize catching the executive.]"

I was worried that it would be hard for other people to see me.

It may seem selfish, but I just hoped that they wouldn't have a hard time seeing me.

At my words, Argent sighed and nodded slightly.

Okay, that's enough.

Really.

1 - Last Exam of the First Year (2)

As soon as I returned to the party, Stella approached me.

She wore a surprised expression, as if she hadn't known until now.

"Is it true that the Theology Department doesn't take exams...?"

Huh…

Why is she asking that all of a sudden?

If we're all attending the academy together, she should know that it doesn't make sense not to take exams…

She seemed quite envious.

Well… from her perspective, the academy exams wouldn't be very appealing.

She's only diligently preparing to receive a scholarship to attend the academy comfortably, and it was clear enough that she didn't particularly like it.

Anyway, since she asked, I should answer.

"[It's not that we don't take exams at all.]"

It's not that we don't take them at all.

Apparently, this exam includes not only written tests but also practical ones. The written part will probably just be answering questions about the Goddess's words, but the practical part won't be.

To work as a priest to heal someone outside, you need to be able to use Holy Power to heal or buff someone in any situation.

'Thanks to that, I've been cramming like crazy.'

I have to memorize the Bible, of all things.

In the game, you didn't have to answer questions; you just had to have a certain amount of Faith stat, and you'd automatically get a perfect score. But this place where I live now is reality, so that couldn't possibly happen.

And if I get a low score on the exam, there will definitely be people who think it's not fitting for a Saintess, so to maintain the concept, I have to get a good score on this exam.

While leaving the preparations for Maleficent's attack to Argent, I had to practice handling Relics and study to maintain my exam scores.

I don't know why I have to do this just to maintain a concept.

"So, you're saying you do take exams after all…?"

"[W-Well, yes…?]"

"…"

Even after my answer, Stella still looked dissatisfied.

… Why?

I really don't know…

"Haa…"

- Why are you sighing, Evan?

"No…"

Evan glanced at Aria, who was talking to Stella, and secretly sighed again.

"I haven't been able to talk to her at all since then…"

- That's because you keep avoiding her, saying you're too embarrassed to face her.

"…"

That was true.

It was good that I confessed back then, but every time I saw Aria's face after confessing, I kept remembering that moment, so I couldn't even look her in the eye and just avoided her.

Now that I think about it, I regret confessing in that way.

"Would it have been better to confess after defeating the Demon King…?"

For Evan, who was experiencing liking someone for the first time, Aria was a really difficult person.

We always have to be together at the academy, but when I actually try to treat her like a friend like before, I keep remembering that moment, so there's an ambiguous feeling.

After all, once you've said with your own mouth that you like someone as a woman, you can't possibly treat them like a normal friend when you meet them again.

I thought I should confess because I was afraid that someone might take her away if I kept going like this, but after I did, it wasn't easy to be friends, so Evan couldn't help but feel frustrated.

I don't know what to do…

- You could just go up to her and do what you usually do… Aria isn't the type to care about that kind of thing anyway.

"Ugh…"

- It's nice that you're being innocent, but this is a bit too frustrating…

For Estel, it was a really frustrating situation.

Of course, the biggest problem is that she's not human but a Holy Sword, so she doesn't understand human feelings.

Even looking past Estel, Evan's actions were definitely frustrating.

- Hmm…

This won't do.

She was getting too bored to keep watching this.

After thinking for a moment about what to do, she suddenly remembered that Aria mainly uses Thought-form.

It was a fact she couldn't forget even if she wanted to.

After all, the only reason she knew that Evan liked Aria was because Aria used Thought-form.

If she hadn't used Thought-form, she probably would have never known unless Evan had come to her for advice or she had witnessed him confessing with her own eyes.

So…

- 'Should I ask Aria this time?'

If things continue like this, it's clear that they won't be talking to each other for a very long time.

She couldn't let that happen.

- 'I'll definitely connect them…'

Now that it's come to this, she made a strong resolution to turn Evan and Aria, who are currently awkward with each other, into a sickeningly lovey-dovey couple someday, even if it's just out of spite.

Estel immediately sent out a Thought-form.

Having been a Holy Sword for a long time, she was a master at handling Thought-form.

Of course, sending a Thought-form that only Aria could hear was nothing.

- Aria, can you hear my voice?

"[… Ah? Lady Estel?]"

- I'm glad you can hear me.

- 'I'm the one who made their relationship like this, but…'

Well, what can I do?

Now that it's come to this, I have to take responsibility, right?

'I'm happy because I can see them being lovey-dovey, and Aria and Evan are happy because they can date…'

Isn't that a good deal?

- Do you remember Evan confessing to you last time…?

"[Ah… you mean that time…]"

Huh?

Her reaction wasn't very enthusiastic.

- 'Does Aria not like him very much…?'

No, that wasn't it.

If she didn't like him, she would have reacted indifferently, not panicked about what to do like she did back then.

So, that reaction isn't because she dislikes Evan, but…

- 'It means she's worried…'

That worry isn't a happy worry, it's either worrying about how to reject him, or there's a reason why she can't accept his confession.

Either way, it wasn't a good situation.

Aria might reject Evan's confession.

It's a bit sudden to say this, but if Aria rejects him right away, it might have a negative impact on Evan.

- 'I should at least hear what's going on…'

If there's anything I can help with, I'll help.

- Um, are you having a hard time because of Evan's confession?

"[Ah… no… rather, I'm happy that he said he likes someone like me. It's just…]"

Aria trailed off, hesitating.

She seemed to be wondering whether to say it or not.

But…

If you don't say it, the situation won't be resolved.

Did she think that? Aria soon seemed to make up her mind, and a clearer Thought-form than before was conveyed.

"[I'm worried that Evan might have a hard time because of me… and that he might be sad when I disappear. Can I, who can't see or hear, truly love Evan… I'm worried about all sorts of things, so I'm wondering if it would be better to reject him.]"

- Hmm…

"[But… I feel too sorry for Evan if I reject him. So I can't do either.]"

Oh my…

How can she be so kind?

Estel was so impressed with Aria that she got goosebumps.

She had seen countless Saintesses in her life, but she had never seen a Saintess with such a pure heart.

Of course, most Saintesses have kind hearts.

Considering that it's almost impossible to be chosen as a Saintess without a pure heart, it's not that strange…

But I never thought she would be so considerate of others, considering her situation and condition.

Besides, this isn't a peaceful time, and we have to go on a journey to defeat the Demon King, so she's even worried that Evan might be sad if she dies, so she's even worried that it would be better to reject him strongly.

- 'Pass…'

This is a pass.

I can't help but pass her.

Now that it's come to this, I'll do my best to connect them, Aria sincerely vowed, recalling the appearances of past Saintesses and Heroes.

Of course, Aria's true feelings were just that she was worried about how to reject him because she would disappear when she returned to her original world.

Estel, she had no way of knowing that.

That was all there was to it…

1 - Last Exam of the First Year (3)

How beautiful is the sight of someone who knows when to leave…

‘Wow… look at the kids disappearing in an instant…’

Students slowly began to leave, one by one.

They were probably all going to take their exams.

It was only natural since there was no reason to stay here anymore.

Since the exams were different for each department, there was no need to stay in the classroom.

Everyone just had to go to their designated exam room, take the written test, and leave.

‘This is exactly the same as the exams I took…’

In the game, you just started the exam, and after a little time, a notification popped up saying the exam was over, along with your score.

Seeing it like this, it felt new again.

“Then, I’ll be going now.”

“Good luck on your exams, everyone~”

“You’re coming with me, Uriel…”

“Oh, right…”

Well, the exams were different for each department.

Stella was the only one who had to go alone from here.

Uriel and Evan would go to the Swordsmanship Department to take their exam, and Stella would go to the Magic Department.

“See you later, Aria~”

Uriel greeted me with a smile, and I returned the greeting.

I hoped everyone would do well on their exams.

Actually, when it came to defeating the Demon King, it didn’t really matter how high your exam scores were.

In the first place, an exam was just a day to confirm how much effort you had put in until that day.

It’s not like you suddenly get stronger just by taking an exam.

If you were going to get stronger, you would have gotten stronger while studying for the exam.

Still, since I’ve been attending the academy all this time, it would be nice to get good grades.

Of course, if you were good enough to get into Argent Academy, you would have studied hard, so there was no need for me to worry.

However, I was a little worried about Evan, who had to roll around here and there following me.

Unlike Stella and Uriel, who had plenty of time to study, Evan had to train incredibly hard as the Hero…

I had a good view of him using Divine Power Detection to try to use that skill he used during the Magic beast subjugation, and the power he had at that time.

He still didn’t seem to have a good grasp of it, but it would happen soon.

‘I wonder if he saw what the previous Hero… looked like.’

I don’t know how that pendant works, but in the setting, it’s supposed to contain the Thought-form of the previous Heroes.

If he saw the Thought-form of the pendant when learning the skill, it would have been the Thought-form of the previous Hero.

‘I’m a little curious too.’

In the game, it was just an illustration with the form of the Hero, and nothing was visible, so I couldn’t help but be curious.

The modeling wasn’t even properly done.

Well… I don’t need to worry about it now.

He seems to be growing smoothly…

If things go as I expect, he will become much stronger than he is now.

I hope he doesn’t have a hard time because of me.

‘That’s an impossible wish, now that he’s confessed that he likes me.’

I had been trying to restrain myself as much as possible because I had given him too much mental shock that caused PTSD before, but this time it was a little too difficult.

My sacrifice was absolutely necessary, even to catch Maleficent.

Anyway…

‘Still, he studied hard…’

He couldn’t put off the exam, so he studied hard, combining training and studying from when there wasn’t much time left until the exam, so even if it’s hard to get a good score, wouldn’t it be okay to some extent?

It’s enough if I don’t get a failing grade.

‘Stella… said she had to get a high score…’

From Stella’s point of view, who doesn’t have any backing, she has to get a scholarship and use it to pay for her tuition in order to attend the academy comfortably.

She has to work hard for that.

‘The exam is coming up soon for me too…’

Unlike the other kids who are going to take the exam right now, I don’t need to go right away, so I can just say goodbye and wish them luck…

I’m taking it in the afternoon, so…

Actually, the person I should be most worried about here is myself.

The other kids have to memorize ordinary knowledge, but I’m a little different.

‘Ah… I don’t want to read the Bible…’

The Bible!

Yes, I have to take a test on what religious people must memorize.

If I were a real religious person, I would have blamed myself for being too lazy to memorize it properly, but I’m not a religious person.

Of course, I believe in God, but that’s only because I know that God really exists, so it’s a little different from the belief that religious people commonly talk about.

If you ask me why I didn’t memorize it, and say that I’ve been living too lazily, I’m a Saintess… Look at how hard I’ve worked to defeat the Demon King.

Frankly speaking, considering that I have the duty to defeat the Demon King, isn’t not memorizing the Bible not that big of a deal?

So, it’s a little unfair to say why I didn’t memorize it.

Anyway, I have to take the exam, and considering that I have to get a perfect score as a Saintess to maintain my image, it seems like it would be good to study a little more in the time I have left…

But there’s one problem left.

‘Where do I start studying…’

The exam covers the entire Bible…!!

It’s not like I was playing around when I was at the Cathedral, so it’s not like I don’t know anything about the Bible, but does it make sense to memorize everything from beginning to end?

Of course, for religious people in this era, it’s not just reasonable, it’s natural, so I had nothing to say.

No, doesn’t it make sense that a Saintess hasn’t even memorized that?

Of course, it doesn’t make sense.

But it made sense while I was living until recently.

Until recently, no one asked me about the Bible just because I was a Saintess.

First of all, the meaning of Saintess is virtually someone who was directly chosen by God, the person who believes in God the most here and now, and the person who is receiving God’s favor, so isn’t it stranger to ask such a person about the Bible?

So, I could have memorized it at my leisure then, but the situation has changed a lot.

Here, I’m not a Saintess, but just a nun…

Like the other nuns, I have to take a test on the contents of the Bible.

It’s not that I didn’t memorize it at all.

It was still enough to get a high score.

But…

‘Since I’m a Saintess, shouldn’t I get a perfect score…?’

The fact that I have to get a perfect score on this kind of exam because I’m a Saintess is holding me back.

Besides, I should go check in case I’ve forgotten anything, but there’s so much content on the exam that I don’t even know where to start.

If the exam comes out with something I don’t know, I’ll get that part wrong.

Then, wouldn’t people doubt that I’m really a Saintess…?

‘I’m going crazy, really.’

Even if I read it until the afternoon, I wasn’t confident that I could memorize it all.

If I go on like this, I’ll just have to gamble and pray to the heavens to give me a perfect score.

Or…

‘What if I don’t take the exam at all?’

Now, not taking the exam and saying, ‘How dare you try to judge the words of the Goddess with mere sentences?’ doesn’t seem like a bad idea.

It feels a bit forced, but there’s no other way…!

It seems much better to take this forced approach than to get a question wrong on the exam.

Still, I've shown a lot of the aspects of a Saintess while living here, and I've subjugated a Demon King Army executive, so they won't think, 'Oh, the Saintess has gone crazy…'

They would rather question it.

'Should I just not study?'

There's so much content, if my score would change by studying for a few hours now, I wouldn't be worried about this.

Then, wouldn't it be better to just not study and rest to my heart's content, and then act as I said earlier?

The more I think about it, the more it seems right.

'I should just rest.'

I thought so and sat down to pass the time… but then I thought of another good way to kill time and got up from my seat.

I should go to the Theology Department infirmary.

Today is the day of the written exam, but if someone with a physical problem comes, they will definitely accept me if I say I came because of that.

And then I'll rest there to my heart's content.

Hmm, that seems perfect.

Let's go.

Of course, I couldn't take the exam even if I wanted to because of my visual and auditory impairments.

They said they would give me a mid-level grade.

…

I was worried for nothing.

4 - Last Exam of the First Year

"Pfft... Kehehe..."

Stella couldn't contain her laughter upon hearing the story, giggling uncontrollably.

In the past, she might have pitied me, but the fact that I studied, thinking I would take the exam, seemed incredibly funny to her.

But I think that's better.

Than being pitied for not being able to take the exam because of my disability.

"I was curious... but I didn't expect you wouldn't take the exam at all."

Evan also said, trying to hold back his laughter.

Just this morning, we were encouraging each other to do well on the exam, but instead of taking it, I rested in the infirmary until everyone else was done.

How should I put it... I should be happy, but I felt strange.

I had been worrying about how to speak well like the Saintess, or how to get away with it even if I didn't get a good score, but as the exam time approached, the reality that came to me was that I didn't need to take the exam because of my visual and auditory impairments.

...

That's reasonable.

When I think about it, I can only read books through the Thought-form flowing from them, and to others, it seems like I can't read at all, so they

probably thought it was impossible for me to take the exam.

How could they ask such a student to take the exam?

It's natural that I can't.

They must know that, so they probably think I don't need to take the exam. But giving me a perfect score, considering I'm the Saintess, would be unfair, so they're giving me an intermediate score.

In the first place, academy scores don't matter to the Saintess, so it's not a problem.

Even so...

'Something feels strange...'

It feels weird.

It's true that I have a disability, but thanks to this disability, which I'm usually so dissatisfied with, I've become a figure of pity.

I didn't intend for that to happen.

The only good thing is that people don't look at me with pity anymore, perhaps because they're used to it.

People with disabilities are just like ordinary people with minor inconveniences, but it's annoying when people constantly look at them with pity and make sympathetic faces.

I didn't used to care, but now that I'm the one experiencing it, I understand why...

Anyway, I want to stop talking about this.

I should change the subject.

"[Did you guys... do well on the exam?]"

"Ah..."

Uriel shuddered.

Well, I expected Uriel to react like that, even if others didn't.

In practical skills, no one here can match Uriel's pure swordsmanship, but unfortunately, she only has talent for swords.

Unlike practical skills, her written exams are terrible...

A genius who doesn't study.

She only knows how to move her body and doesn't study theory because it's too complicated.

That's just like Uriel, but,

'I hope she doesn't fail...'

I'd be really sad if she did.

Well... if it comes to it, I'll have to ask them to be lenient, considering her performance during this attack.

"Stella, how about you? Did you do well on the exam?"

At Evan's question, Stella took out her exam paper and showed it to us as if asking the obvious.

Unfortunately, I can't see the exam paper...

'There's nothing written on it...'

Even if I try to read it, it looks like a blank sheet of paper with nothing written on it.

It seems to be magically treated to prevent cheating, which makes me feel even sadder...

"I don't know what it says, but if it's all circles, does that mean you got a perfect score?"

"As if I would get such an easy question wrong. Of course, I got a perfect score."

Stella said, proudly puffing out her chest.

She had a decent size, but unfortunately, the princess with national treasure-level proportions was right next to her, which only made me sadder.

'Me...'

Well, I barely have any.

While everyone was focused on Stella's exam paper, I briefly touched my chest, but it only bulged out a little and wasn't enough to appeal to anyone like the two of them.

And Evan likes me like this...

'It's not because of my body, is it?'

If he really likes me for who I am, and not my body, would he still like me even if my body suddenly became as big as Uriel's?

That's not going to happen, so it's a meaningless assumption.

"We've taken the written exam, so now all that's left is the practical exam?"

"I suddenly got curious, Aria, are you taking the practical exam?"

Ah, that's right.

Since I said I couldn't take the written exam, it's natural to wonder if I'm taking the practical exam.

Should I go ask?

I briefly wondered if I could just ask another professor nearby, so I immediately approached a professor nearby.

The professor seemed startled and shuddered when I approached.

Judging by their appearance, they seemed to be a professor from the Magic Department... If I were in the Magic Department, I would know who they were, but unfortunately, I'm in the Theology Department, so I don't know.

I gave the professor an innocent smile and asked.

"[Professor, could you please find out if I'm taking the practical exam?]"

Normally, I should go and ask myself, but I thought this would be better than me going directly.

What would they think if the Saintess, who has visual and auditory impairments and the duty to defeat the Demon King, went to the professors who are busy preparing for the next exam and asked if she could take the exam?

I don't know what they would think, but I don't think I would get a good answer.

More than that, wouldn't it seem like I'm really looking forward to it if I went all the way to ask?

Well, still... Unlike the written exam, which I can't take at all, the practical exam requires me to move around, so maybe they'll let me take it.

What else would the students of the Theology Department do?

I can roughly guess that the practical exam will involve teaming up with students from the Swordsmanship Department and the Magic Department to do something.

If that's the case... I can move around using Divine Power Detection and Thought-form Detection, and I can also heal, so maybe they'll let me take the practical exam.

That's what I thought, but...

"[Ah... for healing...]"

It seems I can't take the practical exam either...

"The Saintess's power is not fair to the team... If an accident occurs during the practical exam, would you be able to use your power then?"

I was speechless, watching the professor say that they would never ask me to do such difficult work and that they would try their best to ensure that I could take the exam without causing any accidents.

As I was about to give up, I suddenly realized why they were preventing me from taking the practical exam.

'So I can go straight to where something happens...'

Maleficent's attack happens during the practical exam.

What would happen if such a situation occurred while I was taking the practical exam?

My reaction would be at least one beat slower.

I don't know what would happen then.

So Argent is using my disability as an excuse to prevent me from taking the exam.

That would explain it.

Of course, the written exam was blocked because I really couldn't take it, but I could take the practical exam if I wanted to.

The reason on the surface is that.

Asking if I could use my power if an accident occurred during the practical exam and so on.

Well, what can I do?

I'm the one who said Maleficent's attack would come.

Still, I didn't expect I wouldn't be able to take the practical exam either...

If I had known this would happen, I wouldn't have bothered preparing for the exam...

"What kind of exam is it that Aria can't take?"

"I know... I heard that this practical exam involves forming teams of one person from each of the three departments."

Ugh...

I can't tell them the truth...

Well, what can I do?

I'll just have to watch the other kids take the practical exam.

Of course, I'm not just going to watch, I need to keep a close eye on the Demonic energy so that nothing happens.

And...

'Should I look for the Life Vessel?'

The reason why Maleficent is betting everything on this academy attack.

And the reason why I have to sacrifice myself comes from here.

I have to find and purify the Life Vessel, which is like a lifeline for Maleficent, a Lich.

Evan's current level can't destroy it, so I have to step in.

So then... should I go look for it?

In the game, it was set to appear randomly in a fixed location.

It wouldn't be bad to find it in advance.

I secretly moved my feet.

5 - Last Exam of First Year

Life Vessel…

It's the weakness of a Lich, but it's ambiguous to call it a weakness.

Would it be more accurate to call it a vital point?

Well, like a heart or brain for a human, it's an essential part for a Lich to stay alive.

Of course, if this Life Vessel is safe, it can be used for various things. Especially to use magic powerful enough to easily break through a Barrier created by a mage of the same caliber.

This is why Liches are strong against magic.

And it's also why this raid is the first and easiest raid in the game.

After all, if we succeed in destroying the Life Vessel, we can kill Maleficent, who has been constantly tormenting us, so in the raid, we can't help but focus on finding the Life Vessel.

From Maleficent's point of view, she must have bet everything on this academy raid, and of course, she has no choice but to use the Life Vessel to break through Argent's Barrier spread throughout the academy.

Even for a mage of the same caliber, if that mage created a huge Barrier over a long period of time, even a Lich who has lived for countless years would find it difficult to undo.

Even that high-ranking demon, who was the last resort to break the Barrier, was captured by Argent, spilled all sorts of information, and then died… Maleficent has no way to retreat other than this method.

Of course, it's not like she's attacking with her life on the line… Even Argent can't find out the exact location of the Life Vessel.

The opponent is also a mage who has reached the realm of Archmage, so she wouldn't reveal her weaknesses so easily.

It exists somewhere in the academy, but we can't just wander around this vast academy grounds looking for it.

And if we blow up the entire academy, it would be counterproductive, so we can't do anything about it, and naturally, finding the Life Vessel becomes the player's job.

In the game, Argent somehow finds traces of Demonic energy and tells the player, and the player's job is to follow those traces and find the Life Vessel.

Of course, the later we find it, the more damage we take, so we have to find it quickly, but how can a newbie find it so easily?

Naturally, the first playthrough is extremely damaging, so the academy becomes very chaotic.

Chaotic, or rather, the atmosphere of the game becomes much heavier than at the beginning, so for newbies who came in thinking of an academy setting, this is the first hurdle.

I suffered quite a bit back then too.

It's not like I came in because I liked the academy setting, so I liked the change in atmosphere because it felt realistic, but the game became more difficult than before, so it was harder than I thought.

Of course, after realizing that it appears randomly in certain areas, I reached the point where I could tell where it would appear just by looking at the location of the traces, so sometimes I could finish the raid as soon as it started.

Anyway, to sum it up, this raid can be cleared in an instant if you can find the Life Vessel as quickly as possible.

To do that, you have to know where it appears… In the game, the traces and locations were fixed, so it wasn't that difficult to find, but this is reality, so it might be different.

Of course, I don't think it will be different.

In the game, I didn't care because I thought it was just data, but now they're not just data, they're all living people, so I couldn't let that happen.

I don't like that kind of atmosphere either.

We're only halfway to defeating the Demon King.

It would be nice to have a fun academy atmosphere now.

Of course…

'To catch Maleficent, I have to step up again this time, so it's not a completely fun academy atmosphere…'

I smiled bitterly and walked down the road.

How long had I been walking like that?

"This isn't it, huh."

Believe it or not, I'm the Saintess.

If I get this close, no matter how hard Maleficent tries to hide it, she can't hide it from me, the Saintess.

My ability alone is enough to kill off all the guys with Demonic energy.

But if I can't see even a trace of Maleficent here, let alone the Life Vessel, it seems like it's not here.

Well, if it flows like it does in the game, it will appear randomly in one of three places, so there's no need to worry.

It's not like I can destroy it right away even if I find it.

I think I won't be able to prevent the academy from being attacked because I can interfere at the point when it's weakened to break the Barrier.

I've prepared in advance…

'I just need to find it.'

I just need to find it.

There's one problem…

'The academy… is too big…'

The academy is too big, so it's not easy to go around the whole place in one day.

I won't be using it during the written exam anyway, so I think it's okay to find it a little slower as long as I can find it before the practical exam starts.

With that in mind, I sighed and headed back to the dormitory.

Still, I put it in the outermost part of the outskirts to hide it as much as possible, so it will take a long time to walk back.

The sky is already getting dark just from coming here…

I can't wander around too much looking for something, because I don't want them to find out that I'm looking for something.

Hoping that the next location is the right one, I moved my feet.

"Where is Aria going?"

Stella's question made Evan and Uriel turn their heads to look at Stella.

Stella's question was valid.

Aria had been acting strange since yesterday.

Unlike them, Aria didn't have a written exam to take, so she had plenty of time, but she was constantly spending that time elsewhere.

Of course, if it was being used for good things, her hobbies, or other things that didn't bother them, they wouldn't have any reason to be interested, but it was a little different.

She kept sneaking out and wandering around the academy grounds.

Aria, who gets tired easily even after walking a little, is wandering around so many places every day that she's always exhausted, which they couldn't understand.

Stella, in particular, couldn't help but wonder the most.

She was the one who lived with her.

"Should we follow her?"

"... Don't. What are you going to say if you get caught following her… Aria might get angry."

"That's… true."

Stella scratched her head at Evan's firm words.

Evan's words were definitely valid, but the problem was that she couldn't just leave it alone because she had a feeling that something would go wrong again if she left it like that.

"Oh, did you guys hear the news?"

Stella, who was scratching her head and trying to get over the awkward atmosphere, said to the two of them as if she had just remembered something.

Evan and Uriel tilted their heads, showing their doubts.

"News?"

"They opened the practical exam hall, saying they'd tell us about the practical exam before we take it. I wanted to go with Aria if possible…"

Stella said that as if she was disappointed, but at that moment, Evan felt something was wrong.

There's no way Aria wouldn't know about that.

The fact that she disappeared somewhere at this time, just when the practical exam hall opened, felt strange.

Of course, Aria had been away since yesterday, but that's why it felt even stranger.

It felt like she was trying to do everything by herself again, like last time.

Evan was sweating.

It's not certain.

There's no way I can feel it for sure.

I don't even know why she keeps wandering around, so how can I be sure?

But…

'I have to find her…!'

His senses were telling him it was certain.

Evan ran off in the direction Aria had disappeared, without even telling the two of them.

"E, Evan?!"

Stella and Uriel were greatly embarrassed and ran after Evan.

Even as he ran, Evan kept sweating.

Please let nothing happen, I hope she's just away for some ordinary reason.

6 - Last Exam of the First Year

‘It should be around here…’

I arrived at the third location where the Life Vessel was in the game.

‘To think we both struck out twice…’

Even after the first miss, I told myself it was okay, that you can't expect to find it on the first try. But after the second, something felt off.

Finding it only on the third try meant we had terrible luck.

It was already a headache trying to find each other since we were quite far apart…

Couldn't they have let us find it on the first try? What was with the two misses?

Anyway…

‘Still, I guess I should be thankful I found it…’

If I found it as quickly as possible and neutralized it before the raid started, we could land a decisive blow as soon as it began.

With my power, I could only suppress it, so Evan would have to step in and destroy the Life Vessel himself…

It's practically spoon-feeding him, so if he can't do that, then there's no hope…

“Haa…”

I sighed and arrived at the last storage location, looking around.

An eerie silence, but a small yet ferocious Demonic energy was swirling around, undetectable to anyone but Aselina and me.

‘Bingo.’

My prediction was correct.

I smiled as I saw the Life Vessel hidden among the rotten trees.

‘They thought it would be hidden in the academy's back mountain.’

The only places to hide it were here, the old buildings on the outskirts of the academy, or underground. I'd already searched all those places.

The fact that I couldn't find it meant it had to be here.

Even if it was somewhere else, I'm practically a perfect counter against demons, especially against the Lich, Maleficent, a high-ranking member of the Demon King Army.

There's no way I wouldn't find it.

They even tried to hide it as much as possible, concealing its presence so that only Aselina and I could find it. I should almost praise them for that.

They made it so that you wouldn't notice it unless you were close, so they must have been confident that even with the Saintess attending the academy, it wouldn't be found.

They overcame the type disadvantage and succeeded in hiding it.

But what a pity.

I know all the places you're hiding.

There's no need to worry about the hiding place being different.

It's not like I've been constantly visiting the places where they planned to hide it. I've been living normally and secretly came here just before the

planned attack, so there's no way they could have noticed, even if they wanted to.

That's why I was able to find it so easily.

Well… easy is a stretch, considering the two places I just went to were empty, meaning I had to search more places.

‘Now, what should I do with this…’

Since the attack hasn't started yet, it might be best to just leave it at knowing its location…

‘But what if the location changes in the meantime…’

I didn't spread any Holy Power around, so there's no chance they'd notice, but if they had a way to find out, it would be a disaster. It wasn't easy to decide right here and now.

However, taking action on the Life Vessel right now was a risky gamble, and I wasn't sure if I should do it.

‘Yeah, it's best to leave it as it is.’

If I were a more powerful Saintess, I could destroy Maleficent right now by messing with the Life Vessel.

Since it's hidden in a place like this, there's nothing they could do even if I messed with it here.

But if my level is low, the story changes.

No matter what, it's their lifeline, so it's hard to believe they wouldn't have set up some kind of defensive magic. If I carelessly touched the Life Vessel here, I'd likely be caught in the prepared magic.

Maleficent has faced many Saintesses before, so she definitely knows my characteristics.

I don't know what kind of magic she set up, but it's likely a form of magic that forcibly poisons me with Demonic energy, like a toxin, to neutralize me.

If I can't overcome that, the raid will fail!

That's why I couldn't decide right away and had to think about it.

I was pondering what to do when…

Swoosh…

"…?!"

I remember it being quiet and not emitting any Demonic energy until just now…?

Why is it suddenly causing this phenomenon?

Could it be…

'Did, did they notice I came…?!'

That's impossible.

Unless they're watching me directly, there's no way they could know I found this.

I tried to check the surroundings with Divine Power Detection, but the amount of Demonic energy emanating from the Life Vessel was already far from normal.

I was momentarily taken aback by the Demonic energy that had already filled the surroundings, but I instinctively knew that this wasn't a trap set because they noticed I was here.

The Demonic energy was disorganized, not something aimed at triggering a trap.

Nevertheless, the Life Vessel containing the Lich, Maleficent, who possessed such ferocious Demonic energy that she was called a high-ranking member of the Demon King Army, was emitting power right in front of me, and my legs were gradually losing strength.

I felt nauseous.

The stench was vomit-inducing… as if poison was spreading throughout my body, taking control of me.

“Kuh, haa… hng… cough…”

This is…

This sensation…

The pleasure I felt when that demon directly invaded my body with Demonic energy…

I barely managed to hold back from wetting myself from the pleasure that was turning my mind blank, and I knelt down.

This won't do.

It didn't seem intentional, but if I stayed like this, it would be the same as being neutralized here according to Maleficent's plan.

I don't know why it activated, but I can't just stand still.

‘Sorry, but…’

I've been preparing for this kind of situation…!

I took out all the Relics I had been saving.

‘Healing Holy Power… Purifying Holy Power…’

Filled to the limit, a Lich-specific remedy prepared just for this moment.

Try to survive this, Maleficent…!

“Haaah…!”

I clenched my fists tightly and swung them at the Life Vessel without hesitation.

With a gruesome tearing sound, my fist pierced Maleficent's heart.

And then,

Fwoosh!

“Hnnng…!”

Holy Power burst from my fist with a blinding light, and at the same time, Demonic energy gushing from the heart began to invade my body.

“Ghk… guhh…”

I trembled as I felt the excruciating pain rising up my arm and the Holy Power being corrupted.

The pleasure, incomparable to anything I had felt before, traveled up my arm, past my spine, and into my brain.

‘Th, this is… insane… ugh…♡’

I, I can't do this…

The Demonic energy could be sufficiently overcome with the Holy Power contained in the Relics, yet I was controlling myself, not revealing my full power, and trying to feel more pain.

Unconsciously, to feel even more pleasure.

I knew I shouldn't, but I couldn't stop.

I was trying to enjoy the pain while maintaining my persona, but this pleasure was so intense that it was hard to choose either.

I thought it was unbelievable when I felt a fragment of pain back then, but considering that it was only Demonic energy from a high-ranking demon comparable to a top-tier one, this was even more intense.

The concentration of Demonic energy alone was incomparably denser than before, and it was trying to invade my body more violently.

If an ordinary person were exposed to this Demonic energy, their body would melt away in an instant.

They would melt away as if exposed to overwhelming power, without even being able to transform into a Magic beast due to the Demonic energy. It was no wonder it was the Demonic energy of a Lich who had reached the realm of a great mage.

This… I might not be able to withstand it…

In the end, I couldn't stand for long and collapsed on the spot.

Maleficent's heart was desperately trying to survive, but thanks to the Holy Power I had stored in the Relics, the power of the Relics, and my skill… the purity of the Holy Power due to the fact that I was a Saintess, I was barely maintaining the balance of power.

However…

‘Neutralization… successful… ly…”

I wouldn't be able to move for a while.

I couldn't see or hear anything.

I couldn't use Divine Power Detection or Thought-form Detection.

It was as if I had fallen into a dark space and was facing eternal torment.

I lay on the floor, groaning in pain from the Demonic energy.

Argent and Evan must have already noticed the Holy Power explosion from earlier…

That's… enough…

7 - Last Exam of the First Year

Bang!

"W-What was that?!"

Stella shouted, startled by the sudden loud noise.

It was a sound that was hard to imagine coming from the academy.

Because it sounded like something exploding.

"What could be happening at the academy...?"

Uriel muttered with a worried expression.

Her concern was valid.

Considering what had happened at the academy so far, it wouldn't be that strange if something happened during a Trial.

Of course, that didn't mean she was expecting it to happen.

This generation was the golden generation, a generation where the Hero and Saintess were attending the academy, so she just understood that demon attacks would be concentrated on them.

But…

"That explosion wasn't in the academy."

The three of them had come outside briefly to look for Aria, so they knew.

The explosion had happened in the mountains behind the academy, not in the academy itself.

"Why would there be an explosion in the mountains...? I have a bad feeling about this. We should go check it out."

"Wait a minute. Something seems to be happening at the academy..."

At Stella's words about the academy being chaotic, Evan asked in an anxious voice what she meant.

"Well... the flow of Demonic energy is strange... It's not how the academy usually is..."

At that moment, Evan's eyes widened.

"Get down!"

At the shout to get down immediately, he grabbed Stella and pulled her aside, and in that instant, a thorn grazed Stella and pierced the wall.

Stella, sweating as she stared at the building that had been pierced like tofu, turned her head to look at where the thorn had come from.

- Kikikik…

The thorn that had just been launched made a strange noise as it regrew from its body, as if it could regenerate as many as it wanted.

"That's..."

"A low-level demon..."

Stella and Uriel looked shocked at Evan's words.

Why would a low-level demon be inside the academy?

"There have been high-level demons before, but weren't they sneaking in?!"

"Huh?! There was a high-level demon in the academy?!"

"Ah…"

Stella, realizing she had made a mistake, glanced at Uriel with a look of regret before sighing.

In any case, they couldn't just stand still like this.

Evan drew his Holy Sword.

- Hmm... What's going on...? I-Is that Demonic energy?!

Estel, who had been mumbling in a sleepy voice as if she had just woken up, shouted in surprise.

"Sorry, Estel. Can you help me out?"

- Do you even need to ask what I can do to help? It's our duty to defeat demons anyway.

"That's... true."

He was the Hero.

It was his duty to defeat demons. They weren't living beings like them, but simply nightmares that sought to destroy the world.

He couldn't just stand by and watch.

Evan shot forward in an instant and beheaded the low-level demon that had just launched the thorn.

The demon, belatedly realizing that Evan was charging at it, tried to swing its claws, but the Holy Sword was much faster in severing the demon's neck.

- Ki, eeeck…

Leaving behind the demon that had been instantly killed with its neck severed, he shook the blood off his sword.

"Wow... you've improved a lot."

"Amazing, Evan!"

Stella and Uriel praised him as if they were impressed, and Evan, looking embarrassed, turned his head away for a moment,

- Kikikik…
- Kill kill…
- Kehehehek…

Seeing the demons that began to appear one by one as if they had been waiting for him to draw his Holy Sword, Evan began to sweat.

Something was going strangely wrong.

"If there's more than one demon... could it be...?"

A demon attack.

So, was it an attack by the Demon King Army?

When a single low-level demon appeared in front of him, he hadn't thought it would be this bad, but if there were this many low-level demons even on a path where people rarely walked, then the practical training grounds where students gathered would be…

'Hell…!'

A hellscape would have unfolded.

The reason Stella said earlier that the flow of Demonic energy was strange must have been for that reason.

But what was important now wasn't that problem.

The mountains behind the academy…

That huge explosion of Holy Power that had erupted in the mountains behind the academy… That was too suspicious.

At this time, there was only one person who could unleash that much Holy Power.

Of course, if you were talking about someone who could spread that much Holy Power, there would be two people, but that person wasn't at the academy right now, was she?

"Aria is... she'll be at the center of that explosion."

He didn't have any evidence, but he was certain.

Aria was there.

But…

"Stella, Uriel. I have a favor to ask."

"A favor? Hey, Evan... don't tell me..."

Stella, as if realizing what he was about to say, tried to tell him not to say anything ridiculous, but Evan spoke faster than she did.

"I'm going to save Aria, so I want you to go back to the academy and see what the situation is like and ask Argen Headmaster for help."

Now that he knew where she was, he couldn't just go back like this.

If he went back here, more time would be wasted.

Thanks to the necklace, he had awakened the Hero's power, so no matter how many there were, low-level demons were not enough to block the Hero's path.

But it was enough to buy time.

"Please. I'll hold them off here."

"Tch... you really…"

Stella sighed as if she couldn't help it and approached Evan.

Then, she hugged him briefly.

“…?!”

Evan, surprised by the sudden display of affection, was about to shout and ask what she was doing, but Stella's expression looked serious.

"Wait a minute. Like I said before, the flow of Demonic energy here isn't good, so I have to leave a clear mark like this."

"O-Okay…"

“… Done.”

She stopped hugging him and stepped back, but Evan was still staring at Stella with a dumbfounded expression.

"W-What! It can't be helped even if you look at me like that! What am I supposed to do, I'm worried about Aria too?!"

"Ah, Aria…?"

"I'm telling you in case you're misunderstanding, but the reason I hugged you just now was to imprint my magic on your body, okay?"

That was…

At Stella's words, Evan was finally able to notice that he felt some strange Demonic energy in his body.

'This is... magic I've never seen before?'

When did she create magic like this?

"And anyway, I know you like Aria and I don't particularly like you, so it's better not to misunderstand for Aria's sake."

“… Then the magic is…”

"Tracking magic. To be exact, it's magic that obtains your spatial coordinates using you as a medium. I've developed it much more than last time, so you don't have to worry about making a mistake."

"Last time, you mean…"

"When... when you guys went to the mountains behind the academy."

Only then could Evan remember when that was.

Come to think of it, when they went to receive the Trial of Strength, Stella had suddenly appeared just as they were finishing up.

At the time, he had just brushed it off…

"Anyway, I'm worried about Aria too, but if I don't tell the academy that something happened to Aria here, I have no choice but to listen to you. Got it?"

“… Yeah, I got it.”

Stella said that, but she scratched her head for a moment, as if she was still uneasy about having hugged him, and asked him once again not to tell Aria.

Of course, Evan had no intention of doing so either, as Aria might misunderstand again if he told her that Stella had hugged him.

"If the Demonic energy here wasn't so ambiguous, I wouldn't have done this…"

"O-Okay?"

"Never mind. Explaining it here will only make the atmosphere even stranger. We'll go first."

Stella said that and led Uriel next to her and started walking.

First, they had to get out of here and explain the current situation to Argen first.

She didn't know what kind of demon had attacked, but in any case, the one with the strongest power and authority in this place was Argen Isis, the headmaster of this academy.

Evan's gaze, which had been glancing at Stella and Uriel, who were quickly heading towards the academy, turned towards the demons in front of him.

While gathering Holy Power in his Holy Sword.

"Shall we start with suppressing them first?"

Feeling the Holy Power starting to circulate in his body little by little, he shot out sword energy to suppress them first.

In a one-versus-many battle, it was practically essential.

Before the demons, who were being cut down by the sword energy, could even prepare themselves, Evan rushed out without hesitation.

In order to punish the demons who had appeared in this place and were disturbing the peace as soon as possible.

And…

'Just wait a little longer…!'

Even for Aria, who might be fighting some kind of battle alone in that place.

8 - Last Exam of the First Year

"A, an evil spirit!"

"Run away!"

"Kyaaaa!"

Amidst the pandemonium unfolding within the academy, professors tirelessly cast spells to defeat the evil spirits, striving to save as many students as possible, but it was not enough.

Though they had appeared suddenly, their numbers were unbelievably vast.

"T, this won't do! There are too many of them!"

"Kuk... This is terrible..."

It was then.

Light emanated from the bracelets worn by the students, and one by one, the students who had been fleeing from the evil spirits began to disappear.

"T, this magic is... Argen Headmaster's magic!"

"The magic from earlier was definitely Teleportation magic...!"

Why was Teleportation magic being used here?

There was only one answer.

The device in the bracelets, created as a precaution for the students' safety, had been activated.

They had no idea what kind of magic had been applied to the bracelets, but the identity of the magic circle was Teleportation magic.

"As expected of Argen Headmaster...!"

If all the students could be sent to a safe place through that magic circle, they would no longer need to control their power.

The reason it had been difficult to properly confront the evil spirits until now was that if they used magic with strong power, the students might get caught up in it, which would be a disaster.

Including the instructors of the swordsmanship department, who originally didn't need to hold back because of the students, it was now the turn of the academy's professors to step forward and drive back the evil spirits.

- Kee, keeik?
- Kuaaaa!!

As the students they had been trampling on disappeared one by one, the evil spirits were bewildered, their previously relaxed expressions gone.

Soon, they realized that only those who could easily kill them remained in this place, and the evil spirits screamed and tried to escape, but it was far too late.

They began to use high-powered magic that they had not used until now.

They had been unable to use high-firepower magic because of the presence of the students, but with that obstacle gone, there was no need to hold back at all.

Whoosh!

"Die, you monsters!"

"[Fire Explosion]!!"

- Kieeek! Kieeeeeeek!!!
- Kuaaaa!

- Glug... Gluglug...

Magic with firepower that was incomparable to when the students were being held hostage was unleashed from the staffs.

In the end, they turned to ashes and disappeared one by one without even being able to struggle against the overwhelming power.

"Wow..."

"That's amazing magic..."

Stella and Uriel, who were watching the scene, muttered in disbelief.

They felt that the magicians working as professors at the academy were different for a reason.

'I knew they were extraordinary people even when I was taking classes...'

Even lower-level evil spirits, which were not easy to defeat unless one was a priest or inquisitor with Holy Power who could aggressively utilize the Holy Power of Purification, were beings that could be destroyed with a single spell.

It was only natural.

They were firing high-level magic without incantation.

Although the firepower was relatively weakened in the case of no incantation, it was clear that firing high-level magic without incantation was an incredible feat.

Using high-level magic without incantation was an area of magic that even she could not do. It wasn't entirely impossible if she used memorized magic, but that was it.

She could use intermediate magic without incantation, but from high-level magic onwards, she could not use it without incantation unless it was memorized, which showed the difference in skill and realm.

"It's a bit late to realize, but... I can feel that this is Argent Academy, the best academy in the empire..."

The only part that felt realistic was that it was not easy for students to deal with lower-level evil spirits.

Even then, most of them were too busy running away to even think about fighting them.

However, seeing that second- and third-year students who could use magic to deal with lower-level evil spirits were gathering in groups to subjugate them, it didn't feel realistic again.

Due to the nature of Demonic energy, magic below a certain level was ineffective, so first-year students were too busy running away to even think about subjugating the evil spirits.

There was a reason why she didn't do much damage other than a slight shock when she used the high-level magic [Rising Spear], which she couldn't even use without incantation, on the high-level evil spirit last time.

It could be said that she gave enough damage to be called a slight shock, but the power of Rising Spear that she knew was not that level.

That level of power was only seen in intermediate magic.

'Someday, I will...'

She would definitely grow up like that.

Stella secretly resolved.

"S, Stella! First, we need to ask where Argen Headmaster is!"

"Ah..."

While watching the magic they were using and recalling the memories of that time, she almost forgot her original purpose. Stella, who finally

remembered the reason for coming here at Uriel's shout, approached a professor who had just finished subjugating the evil spirits in this area.

"Hmm? A student? It seems you're not wearing a bracelet."

A professor with a plump body approached, surprised that they were here.

"Professor Alfred..."

"Yes. Are you hurt anywhere? You can rest assured now. It seems like neither of you are wearing bracelets, so let's go with us."

He pointed out that they were not wearing bracelets and said that he couldn't leave them alone, so they should move with them.

But there was a more important issue than that right now.

"Professor Alfred, do you know where the Headmaster is?"

"The Headmaster? If it's the Headmaster, he should be going around trying to save students who aren't wearing bracelets..."

Oh no... Why now of all times...

No, it's only natural.

Even Argen wouldn't know what happened to Evan and Aria, so it would be a priority to save the students who didn't wake up the bracelets faster.

That's the obvious thing to do, but...

'This won't do...'

They don't know what's happening to them right now, and they need to go save them as soon as possible, but they don't even know where the Headmaster is.

As she was stamping her feet, wondering what to do, another professor who had finished cleaning up the evil spirits approached them.

"I'll call the Headmaster. Can you tell me roughly what happened?"

"Professor Robert. Is the cleanup finished?"

"Of course. It seems like all the students in this area have been Teleported, so let's hurry and help the Headmaster save the students in other places. Before that..."

The professor called Robert turned to them.

"It seems like you're looking for the Headmaster..."

"But... aren't they still students? There's no need to find him just because they're looking for him..."

"Take a closer look, Professor Alfred."

"What do you mean..."

The professor's gaze, which had been scanning Stella and Uriel as if wondering what that meant, was filled with astonishment.

"Y, Your Highness...?!"

"If Her Highness Uriel is looking for the Headmaster, there must be a good reason."

While the two people who had grasped the seriousness of the situation were talking to each other, Uriel, who still didn't seem to understand what was going on, tilted her head...

"Uriel... Tell the Headmaster that you have something important to say. You can do it."

Stella, who quickly grasped the situation, said that to Uriel, and Uriel said to leave it to her and approached the two people.

"I have something urgent to tell Argen Headmaster... Is that not possible?"

"... Please wait a moment."

Professor Robert, who nodded at those words, closed his eyes and used magic.

Originally, it would be impossible to contact each other when they were so far apart, but they were carrying magic tools that helped them contact each other in preparation for the upcoming exam.

Of course, it was one of the things that Argen had prepared in order to prepare for Maleficent's attack.

After a while, Professor Robert smiled and turned to the two of them.

"He received the call. He said he's coming this way soon."

Stella, who heard those words, let out a sigh of relief and muttered that it was a relief.

Time was gold right now, as they needed to go save Evan and Aria as soon as possible.

9 - Last Exam of the First Year

"What? Aria disappeared, and Evan went to save her...?"

Argent muttered in astonishment at Stella and Uriel's explanation.

Stella and Uriel nodded.

"This is..."

Argent lowered her head and muttered.

It was a disaster.

She couldn't believe that Aria had disappeared at a time like this.

"Is there a problem? What exactly is Aria..."

"Aria probably went to stop the demons alone."

Stella and Uriel's eyes widened at Argent's words.

"So, someone is behind this?"

Argent nodded at Stella's question.

"Aria has been predicting that a Demon King Army executive would attack during the exams for a long time. Her disappearance this time was probably to prepare for that attack in advance."

Having come this far, Argent couldn't help but know who had done this.

There was no way she wouldn't know.

This vicious and ferocious Demonic energy, the countless number of low-level demons released inside the academy, and even the release of mid-level or higher demons in places where students gathered.

It was clear that Teleportation magic circles were formed everywhere.

The only magician who could commit such an act was a great magician like herself.

"Maleficent... it's that bastard's doing."

Argent chewed her lip and muttered.

"Male... ficent..."

Stella and Uriel were shocked to hear the name.

Especially in Stella's case, she knew what kind of being Argent was referring to, so she couldn't help but be even more surprised.

"Maleficent... the Lich Archmage...!"

"Lich... Archmage?! Wh-Why did Aria go to stop him alone?! He's a Demon King Army executive!"

Uriel, who heard Stella's muttering, looked back at Argent with a shocked expression and asked.

However, Argent didn't know everything either.

She only knew that demons would attack when the academy held the exam this time, and she was preparing for it.

However, one question still remained.

'Aria clearly said that the attack would start when the practical exam started...'

But the attack had already begun before the practical exam had even started.

Argent, who had prepared by listening to Aria's advice that the attack would come when the practical exam started, couldn't help but wonder.

Of course, it was said to be a prophecy based on Divine Revelation, so she couldn't say for sure, but Aria's advice had become unbelievable.

As a result, it couldn't be said that it was completely wrong since the attack did happen anyway.

"Damn it... this is a big problem."

Argent sighed, holding her complicated head.

She wanted to go save Aria and Evan right away.

It might be a bit much to say, but saving Aria was ten times more important than saving the students. If she could save Aria and restore the academy to its original state, she could just revive the dead students.

Yes, from an efficiency standpoint.

But as a teacher, as the headmaster who teaches students at the academy, she knew that she shouldn't think that way.

Just because Aria was more important, she couldn't stand by and watch the students suffer and die.

What should she do?

As Argent pondered for a long time, she suddenly saw Stella.

'This child...'

She had been with this era's Saintess and Hero last time as well.

Uriel was the same.

And...

'Come to think of it, this child... was researching space Teleportation magic.'

She suddenly remembered that she was researching magic that could create a mark and accurately Teleport to that location.

If it was that magic,

If she used that magic, maybe these two could do it without her having to go help.

That's what she thought.

"Stella... was it?"

"... Yes?"

Argent smiled slightly as she looked at the girl who was startled when she was pointed out.

"How far has the research progressed on that mark space Teleportation magic you showed me last time?"

"Ye-Yes? Why are you asking about that all of a sudden..."

"I'd appreciate it if you could tell me quickly. Time is running out."

Stella looked dumbfounded at Argent's words, then fell into thought.

Soon,

"It's still ambiguous to call it complete, but it's much more stable than it was at that time, and the Demonic energy required is also much less than before, so I can use it multiple times. There's no need to worry about failure..."

That's enough.

Argent smiled with satisfaction.

"Give me your hand for a moment. Uriel."

"Ye-Yes?!"

"Please."

Uriel hesitated at Argent's words and reached out her hand.

As Argent took her hand, immediately after,

"Ugh...?!"

She felt an enormous amount of Holy Power leaving her body.

Uriel knelt down and gasped for breath at the power that had left her in an instant.

"This should be enough."

Argent took out a ring with a magic stone embedded in it from her pocket.

"Take this."

"This is...?"

"It's a top-grade magic stone."

"To-Top-grade magic stone?!"

Stella shouted in shock at Argent's words.

A top-grade magic stone, a magic stone with the best efficiency among magic stones, said to be able to store enough Demonic energy to use transcendent magic multiple times.

"I'm sorry, Uriel. I don't have enough Holy Power to use here. I guess I took a lot of your Holy Power. I hope you understand."

"It's... okay..."

Argent looked down at Uriel, who was smiling awkwardly while gasping for breath, with a proud expression and stroked her head.

Cute kid, Argent muttered to herself and turned to look at Uriel and Stella.

'These two... might be able to do it.'

No, they have to be able to.

Argent handed the necklace to Stella.

"You can use the Holy Power in here to save the students. Attack magic and defense magic are also imbued in case the demons attack, so use them well. It's unlikely to run out easily. And..."

Argent approached Stella and placed her hand on her head.

Immediately after, Stella felt familiar coordinates entering her head.

"Can you do it with this much?"

"... Of course."

She even knew what coordinates they were.

Now that the mark had been directly engraved in her head, there was no need to worry about failure.

Stella smiled with satisfaction at Argent's question.

"Take Uriel to the shelter I set up in advance first. I took out as much as I could, so she won't be able to move for a while."

"I will."

"Then... I'll go save Evan and Aria soon."

It was the first time she had entrusted such a task to the students.

She had vowed not to make the students do such things after that day, not to let such things happen again, but in the end, it turned out like this.

Argent had a wistful expression and wished inwardly.

Please, let nothing happen.

"Haa... haa..."

He had barely defeated all the numerous low-level demons blocking the way.

The low-level demons themselves didn't have that much power, but if they rushed in like a flood, he would naturally get tired from defeating them one by one.

In fact, the quantity was infinite, but Evan's stamina was bound to be overwhelmed.

Evan gasped for breath, his stamina gradually failing and scratches appearing here and there.

Being wounded by a demon was a great pain in itself.

Since he was the Hero and was constantly supplied with Holy Power from the Holy Sword, there was no major problem with Demonic energy entering his body, but the pain was indescribable.

"Hoo... at this rate..."

Evan gasped for breath and looked down at the corpses of the numerous demons that had fallen behind him.

Looking back at the corpses of the demons that had melted away from the Holy Sword's Holy Power, Evan steeled his resolve once again. Now that he had come this far, he couldn't back down, he would definitely save Aria and return.

As he resolved... he was almost at the place where Aria's Holy Power had exploded.

But...

"What... is this Demonic energy..."

The closer he got, the more he felt an indescribable, disgusting energy.

With Aria's Holy Power, he shouldn't be feeling this much Demonic energy...

But...

Crackle crackle

Rustle

"Th-This is..."

Something began to rise from the floor.

A monster with only bones, revealing red eyes, let out a silent roar towards him. Evan gripped his sword tightly at the sight of the skeleton monsters emitting intense Demonic energy.

He felt that something was very, very wrong.

To save Aria, he moved forward.

Continuing.

10 - Last Exam of the First Year

Evan broke into a cold sweat as he stared at the monster before him.

He didn't know exactly what kind of monster it was.

But…

"Skull Knight…?! Be careful not to get cut by that sword, Evan!"

Estel seemed to know what kind of monster it was and began to explain.

The more Evan heard about the monster, the more his expression hardened.

Just by looking at it, as Estel said, he could tell it was an extremely dangerous monster.

The rusty sword in its hand and the skull that looked like it would crumble if touched might not seem very dangerous, but the armor covering its entire body, as well as the aura emanating from its entire being, was undeniably Demonic energy.

Just looking at the dark energy surrounding the sword, one couldn't help but realize that appearances could be deceiving.

'If I get hit by that, it's over…!'

Back when they weren't using magic in wars, they would often smear all sorts of filth on their swords to kill their opponents.

Back then, people said that just getting a slight cut from a sword smeared with filth could lead to days of suffering and eventual death…

But if a normal person could die just by touching it, then getting grazed by that sword, which was saturated with Demonic energy, would render him immobile.

Of course, if he became stronger, he wouldn't get cut by the sword in the first place, and even if he did, the Demonic energy wouldn't easily invade his body.

But right now, Evan was just a newly awakened Hero.

If he were exposed to that much Demonic energy, even a graze from that sword would mean defeat.

"The Skull Knight's weakness is its skull. Sever its neck with an attack imbued with Holy Power!"

'Only one chance…'

Evan nodded at Estel's advice that facing the Skull Knight head-on would be difficult due to its high-level swordsmanship.

'In that case…!'

Evan burst forward.

The Skull Knight identified the human with Holy Power charging towards it as a hostile target and, with red light flashing in its eyes, swung its sword horizontally as Evan approached.

Evan, lightly ducking to avoid the blow, swung the Holy Sword from below to sever the Skull Knight's arm joint, but the Skull Knight anticipated this and parried the attack.

Evan's eyes widened at the physically impossible trajectory of the sword.

"Dodge, Evan!"

Evan narrowly avoided the attack at Estel's scream and jumped back to create distance.

"What, what was that just now…?! The trajectory of the sword bent in a physically impossible way…!"

Unbelievable.

How could it wield a sword like that?

Evan broke into a cold sweat as he circled the Skull Knight, maintaining his distance.

Soon, he noticed something strange.

'Its arm joint… is twisted…?!'

Could it be that it was forcibly twisting its body with Demonic energy to move?

Even though it was an undead, it was still essentially a human body, so forcibly twisting its arm instead of moving it according to its original structure would weaken it.

It would become a structure that couldn't generate power.

But just now, it had displayed tremendous speed despite not moving according to its original structure.

'I need to be careful…'

Evan sighed and took a stance.

It was impossible to win with swordsmanship alone.

It wasn't that it was using an incredibly high level of swordsmanship, but the way it attacked was so unconventional that fighting like this would drag on.

Evan, who needed to rescue Aria as quickly as possible, didn't want to waste time with the Skull Knight.

In that case…

Evan gathered power into the Holy Sword while simultaneously gathering Holy Power into his other hand.

Unlike him, who could somewhat block Demonic energy on the surface, the Skull Knight was completely exposed. If Holy Power touched it anywhere, it would be a significant shock to the Skull Knight.

That was his plan.

"Sorry, Estel."

"What? Wait, Evan, you…!"

Evan, covered in Holy Power and with Holy Power in his hands, took a stance and charged forward once more.

This time, he would attack in a slightly different way, focusing on incapacitation.

He didn't want to waste time, but recklessly rushing in to break through faster could lead to being countered.

In this situation, it was better to take some time to incapacitate it and then sever its neck to ensure victory.

In any case, in terms of raw power, he was stronger than the Skull Knight, so if they clashed head-on…

The Skull Knight, recognizing his approach, moved its arm once again to swing its sword at Evan, but this time, he had no intention of dodging.

Clang!

He openly charged in, and the Holy Sword clashed with the Demonic energy-infused sword.

However,

"As expected… it's tough…!"

It was impossible to block the Skull Knight's attack, which was wielding the sword with both hands, with just one hand.

No matter how much he covered his body in Holy Power to maximize his physical abilities, he couldn't overcome the difference in size.

But…

"Ugh! Evan?! Your power…!"

"Just hold on a little longer!"

Estel was the Holy Sword with a will of its own.

After pouring Holy Power into it with one hand and releasing the power to allow Estel to block the attack, Evan quickly infused magic into the Holy Sword and extended his other hand, covered in Holy Power filtered from the Holy Sword, towards the Skull Knight's hand.

The Skull Knight, belatedly realizing Evan's attack, released its grip and tried to retreat, but it was already too late.

Crack!

The bones in both of the Skull Knight's arms, imbued with powerful God of Purification's Holy Power, shattered, causing it to drop the greatsword it was holding.

Then,

"Haaap!"

He slashed the Holy Sword diagonally upwards, accurately severing the neck connected to the spine.

Evan panted, glancing at the sword energy cutting through the air and the Skull Knight's skull soaring into the sky.

"Khh… haa… haa…"

He felt a burning pain in his left hand, which had touched the Skull Knight's body.

He could see the skin on his left hand, invaded by Demonic energy, decaying and melting away.

It was just a slight wound on the skin, but the pain was immense.

It had only touched a part that was heavily surrounded by Demonic energy for a moment, and he had been covered in Holy Power, so it had ended like this.

"Are you okay…? The pain must be considerable…"

"It's okay… Aria has endured even greater pain than this."

Even so, she always sacrificed herself for others.

He couldn't whine about something like this.

Evan gripped the Holy Sword tightly and walked deeper into the forest.

'Somewhere in here… there must have been an explosion of Holy Power somewhere in here…'

Where was Aria?

He continued to heal his painful left hand with Holy Power as he walked deeper inside when…

"... I can feel Holy Power."

Evan's eyes widened at Estel's words.

If there was a place where Holy Power could be felt in this place, it could only be where Aria was.

"Where, where is it!"

Evan shouted, and Estel, startled, told him the direction.

How long had he walked in that direction?

Evan, having arrived at the place where the traces of Holy Power were last felt, pushed aside the slightly improved pain and looked around.

However…

"What…"

The closer he got…

"What happened here…"

The forest was losing its form.

The forest was so devastated that it was hard to believe it was the same forest that was behind the academy. The trees were withered, and black flames were rising.

The black flames, clinging to everything, were fiercely burning to find more to consume, emitting a ferocious energy.

Something was wrong.

This was supposed to be a place where Holy Power was felt.

It was supposed to be the site of a Holy Power explosion, so why did it look like this?

"Evan… th-there…"

Estel's trembling voice reached him.

In response, Evan turned his shaking eyes and looked down in the direction Estel was pointing.

There…

"A, Aria…"

Aria, with half of her body melted and decayed, was collapsed on the ground.

She was definitely being healed.

The Holy Power gushing fiercely from her heart was healing her body and purifying the surroundings, but the heart held in her right hand was also polluting the surroundings without giving in.

Thump! Thump!

The decayed heart held in her melted right hand was beating roughly in a chilling manner.

Furthermore, the decayed Demonic energy flowing from Aria's right hand was spreading to the surroundings.

The Holy Power constantly rising from Aria's body was constricting the heart, but even so, the Demonic energy still flowing from the heart had not lost its power and wanted to devour Aria.

Traces of tears could be seen flowing from one of her eyes, which had not yet decayed and had lost its vitality.

Each time it thumped, the ground was polluted.

Each time it thumped again, Aria's body…

"Ugh… urgh…"

Evan couldn't hold back what was rising and collapsed on the spot, continuing to vomit.

A disgusting smell stung his nose.

1 - Last Exam of the First Year (Intermission)

What on earth happened here?

Evan tried to look at Aria with trembling eyes, but couldn't bring himself to meet her gaze and turned his head away.

He knew that Aria wouldn't die even if she ended up like that, but the fact that she was collapsed in such a state was a great shock to him.

"Haa… haa…"

- Evan! Are you okay?! Evan!!!

"I'm okay… Ugh…"

He turned his eyes away, and although it had barely improved, the pungent stench remained.

What…

What on earth happened in this place?

Evan carefully turned his head again, so as not to be startled, and looked at the rotten, pulsating heart in Aria's right hand.

He didn't want to see it, but he couldn't resolve the situation unless he did.

"It's not… Aria's heart, is it…"

She was holding it in her right hand, and starting from that right hand, only the right side of her body was exposed to Demonic energy, decaying and melting away.

So, it was hard to think that it was Aria's heart.

Then that means it's someone else's heart…

'A demon's heart…'

In fact, that was the only possibility.

But even if it was a demon's heart, for it to have enough power to make Aria, the Saintess, faint from not being able to withstand the Demonic energy flowing out of it?

Does that make sense?

'Then that heart is…'

At least it had to be the heart of a Demon King Army executive.

Aria fought an executive alone and won, extracting the heart, but the power flowing from the heart was so strong that she was overwhelmed?

'That's not it either…'

It was even harder to think that way.

If the power flowing from the heart was so strong that she was overwhelmed, then winning against the executive in the first place would be nonsense.

That means…

'This heart… was here?'

What kind of demon would take their own heart, not even from their own body, and secretly abandon it in the back mountains of the academy?

There's no way they would do that unless that heart played some important role.

But right now, he had to assume that they did.

Yes, if he thought of that heart as playing an important role in this attack, then Aria came here to stop that role…

And to block the energy flowing from the heart, she tried to purify it by touching it directly with her hand, but she couldn't overcome the immense Demonic energy and collapsed… Could that be the explanation?

"Keuk…"

Evan looked at Aria.

He knew that he had to judge the situation by seeing it with his own eyes.

But…

'I can't look…'

He had seen Aria hurt many times before.

But this time it was on a different level.

He couldn't believe that he had to see a person melting away from being exposed to Demonic energy, especially someone he liked.

Especially the appearance of someone he thought would never happen to…

"Ugh… ugh…"

Evan couldn't look at Aria any longer and turned his gaze away again.

As much as he liked Aria, her current appearance was too much of a shock to him.

It would have been a great shock even if they had just met.

There's no one in this world who would enjoy seeing the horribly melted corpse of half a girl's body.

Except for those who would vomit as soon as they saw it and carry it as a lifelong scar.

But if that person was a friend.

If it was a girl he liked.

How great would the shock be?

- Evan…

"I have to endure…"

The Hero who defeats the Demon King and brings peace to the world.

He knew that was him.

He couldn't break down with just this.

He shouldn't…

He knew he shouldn't…

Evan slumped down.

He couldn't endure it.

There's no way he could endure this.

He couldn't do it anymore because it was too hard.

How many times was this?

How many times was this?

Evan sat down on the spot and moved his legs little by little towards Aria, crawling.

"This… this… it's because of this…"

Evan barely controlled his mind, which felt like it was about to go crazy, and raised his Holy Sword towards the rotten, pulsating heart.

His eyes gleamed with madness.

"It's… because of this…"

It must be because of this heart.

Evan gathered Holy Power into the Holy Sword.

If he could just smash this damn heart, even if Aria's hand would be smashed along with it, he could regenerate Aria's hand as long as he could smash the source of the problem.

Even though it was far away… and he had to draw Sword energy from the Holy Sword and fly it, so Aria's body wouldn't be safe either.

But anyway, if he could just destroy that heart that was constantly scattering Demonic energy, Aria would return to normal…

- Evan!

"Keuk…"

At the same time as Estel's shout, the Holy Sword shook violently and flew out of Evan's hand, embedding itself in the ground.

Evan stopped his movement to strike down with the Holy Sword that had left his hand and looked back at the Holy Sword with trembling eyes.

"What are you doing, Estel! We have to help Aria quickly!"

- You're right, but calm down! This isn't a situation that can be solved by recklessly launching attacks!

"Calm down? You said calm down?"

Evan's expression twisted.

Tears were flowing from his wide eyes.

"You… can you stay calm even after seeing that…?"

- …

"How can I stay calm after seeing that! I feel like I'm going crazy! I'm already having a hard time having to defeat the Demon King, but why, why… is this happening to Aria… to me!!"

Evan half-shouted at Estel and covered his face with both hands.

His trembling shoulders were telling her what Evan's heart was like, what kind of feelings he was feeling.

"Estel… can't I… not be the Hero…?"

Eventually, Evan, who was leaning against a nearby tree and sitting down, lowered his gaze and muttered.

- Evan…

"I don't really want to be the Hero… why, why… does it keep turning out like this…"

There are hardly any people in the world who want to be the Hero.

How many people would want to take that position, where the peace of the world… the lives of all people become a weight that presses down on their backs.

Even so, the fact that the Goddess and the Holy Sword designated Evan as the Hero meant that there was a good reason for it.

- I despise myself for only being able to say 'hang in there'… but I can't help it… you have to do it.

"…"

- If it's not you, this world will… be destroyed by the Demon King.

"If it's a world that will be destroyed by the disappearance of just one person…"

- Evan…!

“… Okay, I shouldn’t say things like this.”

A world where everything is entrusted to him.

Ha, wouldn't it be better for such an irresponsible world to just perish?

What kind of God is the Goddess who entrusts the position of Saintess to a poor girl with visual and auditory impairments, and gives the fate of the Hero to a boy who didn't know anything?

He wanted to argue right away.

But…

"I never believed in Gods in the first place."

Evan got up from his seat.

He didn't believe in Gods.

He didn't want to believe.

If this was reality, if this was the truth, he could confidently say that even the most devout priests or nuns would have cracks in their faith in God.

But…

"I'm going to save Aria."

He only stood up again for that reason.

He didn't need any other reason.

Even defeating the Demon King Army and the Demon King… it was all to eliminate Aria's disability. He didn't care about the peace of the world.

The reason I'm trying to defeat the Demon King as the Hero is because of a personal wish.

Didn't he make a promise even in the Trial of Wisdom?

That smile at that time, that expression she made while looking at me with her eyes open.

He wanted to hear Aria's voice again.

Evan reaffirmed that promise at that time in this place.

Of course, it's still difficult to face Aria's current appearance.

But…

If he didn't do it, it would only become more dangerous.

'If I don't do it, it won't work.'

If he gave up and gave up everything here, that would be the end.

What kind of state was this after confessing to Aria?

If he was going to confess to a girl who had declared that she would defeat the Demon King, shouldn't he be able to confidently say that he would defeat the Demon King first?

That's why he felt like he could do it now.

Holy Power began to rise from deep within Evan's body.

- This is… Holy Power…?!

Estel exclaimed in a surprised voice.

Once before, this had happened.

When he awakened his power as a Hero… only at that time did Holy Power rise from within his body.

Could it be that he had regained his power from that time again?

That was the moment she thought.

- The necklace…?!

The necklace that Evan was wearing began to shine again.

The same light as last time, the moment this light shone last time, he had awakened his power as a Hero.

"…"

Evan closed his eyes, feeling that what was coming had come.

Before he knew it, Evan's consciousness had been transferred to a pure white space with nothing in it.

1 - Maleficent Subjugation (1)

This place is…

So, I ended up inside the necklace again, just like last time.

Evan looked around, recalling the memory from then.

Come to think of it, I remember coming here when I first awakened the Hero's power… Back then, too, surely…

- Are you looking for me?

“…!”

Here it comes.

A man who looked similar to Evan, but somehow much more grown-up than he was now, was looking down at Evan with an expressionless face that conveyed nothing.

“I don’t think we properly talked last time… Who exactly are you?”

- I thought you’d ask. Yes… It’s probably good to know at least some of it.

The man closed his eyes.

- You probably know that this necklace isn’t ordinary.

“That’s… Yes.”

I know it’s not an ordinary necklace.

Otherwise, it wouldn’t be possible to meet someone through the necklace like this.

But…

- That necklace contains the Thought-form of the previous Hero.

“That’s…”

But I didn’t know that much.

Aria had mentioned it before, but she hadn’t told me in detail, and Aria herself had only found out about it through ancient books.

Naturally, she didn’t know everything, so she didn’t know that it contained all the Thought-form of the previous Hero.

But…

“Why is a necklace with the Thought-form of the previous Hero in a place like that? It didn’t seem like any of the previous Heroes except me had ever used that necklace… Estel didn’t know about it either.”

Something was strange, according to what the man in front of me was saying.

Aria said that an ancient Hero used it, but Estel, the owner of the Holy Sword, didn’t know anything about this necklace, and it was even hidden in the back mountains where no one knew about it?

Only that you could get it if you overcame the Trial of Power… Even Aria only knew that much, and I got the necklace from a completely hidden place.

- I was wondering about that at first, too. But if you think about it, isn’t it strange? They say the previous Heroes used it, but Estel didn’t even know it existed.

“…”

That’s right.

Estel didn’t even know it existed, but the identity of that necklace is something with the Thought-form of the previous Hero?

“Then what was it that came out until now…? Are you perhaps the ancient Hero?”

Evan instinctively knew that what he was saying wasn’t true, but for some reason, he felt like he had to ask.

Even though he knew that what he was thinking was absurd, he couldn’t stop asking.

The man, who smiled bitterly at Evan’s question, closed his eyes and answered.

- … I’m not the ancient Hero, but as I said earlier, it’s true that I am the previous Hero.

The previous Hero…?

Evan looked up at the Hero’s face.

It’s hard to say this, but the face of the man who introduced himself as the previous Hero looked very similar to his own.

He looked much more mature than he was now, and he had the demeanor of a veteran who seemed to have gone through all sorts of hardships.

It was hard to believe that he was showing such a figure in a form similar to himself, of all people.

“Then why do I look so similar to you…”

- It’s only natural that you look similar to me.

The man continued as if asking what was obvious.

The reason why we have to look similar.

Evan swallowed hard and listened to the next story.

Finally, the man's mouth opened,

- I am… your future self.

Evan wore a blank expression and froze in place.

The academy, where many students had been happily walking around until just a moment ago, had somehow turned into hell.

No students had died.

The students who were in the place where the demons appeared were able to Teleport to a safe place through the bracelets they were wearing in preparation for the practice, and the remaining students were able to escape safely through the professors.

It was a miracle that it was possible in the first place because most of the students were in the training grounds.

But even if all the students had escaped safely, the fact remained that the academy, which was the students' home and place of learning, was being trampled on in a miserable state.

Argent gritted her teeth as she watched the academy she had built over hundreds of years collapse.

"Maleficent…!!"

Then, she swept away hundreds and thousands of demons rampaging through the academy and shouted in an angry voice.

She couldn't stand the sight of the demons constantly appearing even though she had to leave her position to save Evan and Aria.

But…

“H, Headmaster…!”

Stella’s call made her swallow her anger.

Now is the time to be patient.

The professors would know how to defeat the demons and protect the students.

The academy can always be rebuilt after this is over, so it was right to focus more on the sprouts that would grow in the future rather than worrying about the academy now.

Argent put the Demonic energy she had been gathering to sweep away the demons back in and sighed as she turned to Stella.

“… Yes. You said you know where the coordinates are, right?”

“Yes, I can Teleport right now.”

Argent nodded at Stella’s words and replied.

“Please.”

No matter how angry she was, the first priority now was to go and save Aria and Evan.

She had to save them first to have a chance of winning this war.

It was impossible for her alone to stop Maleficent.

The place where Aria said she was hiding the Life Vessel was the main body, and the other main body in the Demon realm would be preparing to manifest in the academy.

Before manifesting in the academy, she had to find the Life Vessel and destroy it.

“Then I’ll move…!”

Stella, who had confirmed that everyone was gathered, checked the coordinates and tried to use Teleportation magic.

However,

"… Huh?"

She had definitely succeeded in confirming the coordinates, and there was definitely nothing wrong with the Teleportation magic to move there.

'I can't move…?!'

For some reason, she couldn't Teleport there.

It was as if something was blocking it, and something was preventing the magic from being cast.

"What should we do…?! The magic isn't being cast…!"

Argent's eyes widened at those words.

She should be able to use magic itself…

If a Barrier had been spread throughout the entire academy to make it impossible to use magic, not only her but also the other professors would have been helpless.

But the fact that it wasn't meant that only moving in that direction was blocked.

In other words…

'This isn't a good situation.'

Argent said, sweating coldly.

"… It's probably because of Maleficent's Demonic energy. If my guess is correct, Aria is now fighting Maleficent's Life Vessel."

She said, recalling what Aria had said at that time.

She moved to directly purify the Life Vessel.

Otherwise, the current situation could not be explained.

"…?!"

Stella wore a surprised expression when she heard those words.

If what she was saying was true, then the huge Holy Power explosion that had just occurred meant that she had used it to fight the Maleficent, a member of the Demon King Army.

Since the Life Vessel meant the Lich's heart, it was not certain whether Aria could properly deal with it yet.

Maybe…

"I don't have a good feeling about this. I think we should go quickly."

Argent must have felt uneasy as well, as she simply lifted Stella and Uriel with levitation magic.

"I want to tell you to go back… but in this situation, you're the only one who knows the location of Aria and Evan."

Argent, who was about to send the two to a safe place, suddenly realized that not only did she not know the location of Aria and Evan, but Stella was the only one who knew it, so she reluctantly singled out only Stella.

Getting the coordinates was also a way, but…

'You're not going to back down.'

Neither Stella nor Uriel had any intention of escaping from this place.

They had come all the way here to help Aria and Evan even a little more, so they couldn't escape now.

“Yes… Let’s go quickly.”

Argent sighed inwardly, but praised the courage of the two and vowed to protect them, and moved at high speed towards the coordinates Stella had taught her.

It was okay since there was no direct clash with Maleficent anyway.

‘Life Vessel…’

I will definitely find it by reverse-calculating the location through that heart.

2 - Maleficent Subjugation (2)

"What... What do you mean...?"

Evan asked with a hardened expression in response to the man's words just now.

- It means exactly what I said. I am your future self.

Future self.

Yes, somehow... Even though he thought it was nonsense, Evan finally understood why the man had an appearance similar to his own.

If he claimed to be Evan's future self, it would explain why he had such an appearance.

However, being able to explain something and being able to believe it were two separate matters.

Evan asked the man in a trembling voice.

"B-But... Does that make any sense? You clearly said just now that this necklace contains the thought-forms of past Heroes..."

- Yes, that's what I said. If I didn't exist as a thought-form in this necklace, you would have encountered the ancient Hero who last inherited this necklace.

"Then why is my future self..."

- I don't know that either.

"You don't know?"

Who would believe him when he acted like he knew everything up until now, only to suddenly claim ignorance?

I was about to tell him not to say such strange things and to answer me immediately, but the man shook his head as if he truly didn't know.

- The wish I made to the Goddess was... only to be able to return to the past.

"A wish...?"

Evan's eyes shook greatly at the word "wish."

Wish.

There was really only one place where the word "wish" would come up.

"Did you... defeat the Demon King?"

- Yes, I succeeded in defeating the Demon King. Unlike sealing, it was a definitive defeat, so peace should have lasted for a long time.

"...!"

Evan smiled happily at that.

If the words of the man who introduced himself as Evan's future were true, it meant that he had actually succeeded in defeating the Demon King together with Aria.

He had thought that maybe it would be possible someday if he worked hard enough.

But...

The man who introduced himself as Evan's future self and delivered this good news was not smiling at all. Instead, he trailed off at the end of his sentence and wore a sad expression.

Come to think of it, that's how it was.

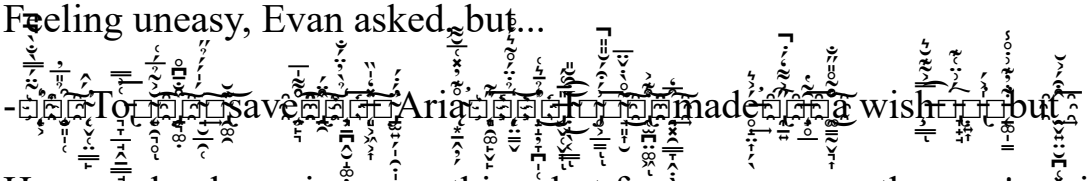
He had confidently said that he defeated the Demon King, but afterwards he had worn a sad expression.

Why...

Why...?

"Then why did you try to go back to the past...?"

Feeling uneasy, Evan asked, but...



He was clearly saying something, but for some reason the man's voice could not be heard.

"What..."

Just as Evan was about to ask what strange thing he was trying to say, the man clicked his tongue.

- It seems I'm being prevented from saying anything more.

"Prevented?"

- If you became a Hero with the power to transcend the laws, I could convey everything fully... but unfortunately, it seems I can't say any more than this. I could break through the restrictions by using my power, but I used up a lot helping you last time.

"... Ah! That time with the magic beast..."

No wonder.

It was an attack far too powerful to be a technique he could use himself.

He had even wondered why he wasn't tired at all after using that attack...

- The fact that I can even bring this up now is only because you've awakened your second power as a Hero.

The man muttered, biting his lip tightly.

- To think that even my wish to turn back time wasn't granted properly... Is this all I can do, just dwelling in the necklace as a thought-form of a past Hero? Why can't I even properly convey this much!

Eventually, he shouted as if frustrated with the current situation.

- I don't want to believe in something like fate... but to think the restrictions would be this strong...

Restrictions.

Fate.

It was full of incomprehensible words.

"If you defeated the Demon King... why did you try to come back to the past?"

- ... It seems I can't say that either.

"..."

- Don't worry. You already have sufficient conditions to achieve the second awakening. Now that you've qualified, receiving that power shouldn't be too troublesome as long as I'm here.

But that was all.

Although he hadn't come expecting to receive any information, it was frustrating that the man seemed like he was going to say something but ended up not being able to say anything.

- I apologize. Although it was said that all wishes would be granted, it seems that my future self changing the past was not permitted,

unfortunately.

However.

The man continued.

- If I was going to give up just because of something like this, I wouldn't have attempted it in the first place.

"...!"

It wasn't that there was no way.

The existence of restrictions only applied to relationships between separate individuals.

Although Evan and the man were the same person, they had different years of life and experiences... they were the same person who came from a different time axis.

In a way, they could be considered separate individuals.

But if they became the same person.

Because they were separate individuals but the same person, and because only a thought-form remained now, there was one method that was possible.

The man, who had already realized what he needed to do, stared at Evan with wide eyes.

It had to be done.

If it wasn't done here, it couldn't be done.

The man shouted:

- Listen carefully, Evan! From now on, you must focus on training and reach the final awakening as quickly as possible! You have one last chance!

And then he walked proudly towards Evan.

Looking up at the man who was now standing in front of him, Evan swallowed hard.

- I'll awaken you now. And...

The man held out his hand.

Evan looked down at the outstretched hand, then looked back up as if to ask what this was.

- I'll use up all the power I have now to dwell in your subconscious.

"What? That's..."

- Don't worry. I am you, after all... Nothing will change from now even if I enter your subconscious. What I want to give you is just the experience of my subconscious, and...

The man continued with a bitter expression.

- I want to convey the memories I have to you. This is... the reason why I came back to the past, going to such lengths.

"..."

Evan couldn't continue speaking.

Perhaps thinking there was no more meaning in staying here any longer, the man smirked and then focused his consciousness towards Evan.

Eventually, all the energy in the man's body began to flow towards Evan.

Evan felt strength rising throughout his body as the power flowing from the man entered him.

It was real.

This was real.

The man was truly handing over everything he had.

Perhaps because he thought the man might really disappear like this, Evan called out to him in shock, over and over.

However, the man continued to hand over his power without paying any attention.

"W-Wait a moment...!"

Having handed over all his power, all that remained of the man was an extremely small portion of thought-form. Even in his transparent and faint state, he was still looking at Evan.

"Wait, don't go yet! There's still more I want to ask...!!"

- You'll learn all of that. I've given you everything. Once you achieve the final awakening, you'll be able to figure out everything.

The man smiled wistfully at Evan, while also wearing an expression of relief as if he had laid everything bare.

- Please... take good care of Aria...

Finally, his form completely disappeared, and the world inside the necklace slowly began to crumble.

Evan, who had fallen to his knees inside,

For just a brief moment.

A short instant when he escaped the restrictions of the world.

"... Ah."

Evan's expression changed as if he had realized something.

Then light burst forth and the world went dark.

3 - Maleficent Subjugation (3)

Argent wiped the cold sweat from his brow, surveying the devastated forest.

He distinctly remembered that just this morning, before this whole mess, it wasn't this ruined. What on earth had happened?

"What... what happened here?"

The forest was utterly destroyed.

The academy's back mountain, once vibrant with the colors of nature, had become a place of decaying trees, completely melted down by the influence of Demonic energy.

"No way..."

Stella and Uriel, also surveying the forest, were speechless at the shocking sight.

"I was here last time... there's even less of how it used to be..."

Stella wore a look of utter dismay as she saw the ruined state of the back mountain's forest, which had been so beautiful.

How could this have happened?

"Maleficent..."

It wasn't a particularly well-tended forest, but it was the mountain behind the academy where the children took classes, so a sense of loss was unavoidable.

"Evan... Aria, where are you?"

As Argent muttered Maleficent's name in an angry voice, Stella and Uriel looked around, searching for Evan and Aria.

However, the forest was vast, and the coordinates were strangely distorted due to the strong Demonic energy and Holy Power, making it difficult to pinpoint their exact location.

They knew they were somewhere nearby, but finding out exactly where was not easy.

But they couldn't give up here.

"We have to find them..."

Just as Stella muttered that she would find them no matter what,

Boom!

"Wh-what is that?!"

"That explosion...?!"

Argent and Stella, startled by the sudden explosion, turned to look in the direction it had come from.

If they only felt a strong explosion of Holy Power nearby, it would be no different from before, so it was highly likely to be Aria's doing, but this was different.

"This feeling... this Holy Power isn't Aria's."

Argent said, sweating profusely.

It was Holy Power that was too ferocious to be the Saintess's, and it contained a power closer to purifying everything.

Because she had been with the Hero for so long in the distant past, she couldn't help but know that the current explosion of Holy Power did not come from the Saintess.

How could she not know?

For her, Holy Power was the most familiar power after Demonic energy.

"Hero... has he awakened?"

Argent muttered in astonishment.

At this point, she couldn't help but know.

Argent, sweating profusely, hoped that the situation would not unfold as she feared, and first moved in the direction where the Holy Power felt strongest.

And,

"Evan...!!"

The three were finally able to find Evan.

"Evan...?"

"Aria..."

With a bewildered expression, tears streaming down his face, Evan looked somehow different. Seeing Evan and Aria, who was crippled and lying on the ground, the three rushed over with surprised expressions.

"Why... why am I crying...?"

"What happened here! What happened to the Saintess...!"

And Argent's eyes widened at the decaying heart held in her melted hand, from which Demonic energy was flowing.

"Th-this is..."

Only after seeing that did she understand what had happened here.

"Don't tell me... she tried to purify Maleficent's Life Vessel alone...?!"

Argent muttered in shock.

She had said that Maleficent would place a Life Vessel somewhere in the academy and use it to break through the academy's Barrier and invade, so finding the Life Vessel was the priority, but she never thought she would try to purify it alone.

Even that seemed to be half successful, as the decaying heart was considerably weakened.

"A, Aria..."

"Don't look... Uriel."

She covered Uriel's eyes, who was horrified at the sight of Aria, and said in a sad voice.

She knew it couldn't be helped.

She also knew that this was a golden opportunity to catch Maleficent, a member of the Demon King Army.

But...

This sight... she couldn't show it to Uriel, who wasn't yet used to seeing Aria like this.

"I'll cut it down right now."

While Stella covered Uriel's eyes and Argent was deep in thought, Evan, who had been looking down with a confused and complicated expression, raised his head and looked down at the decaying heart, the Life Vessel, in Aria's hand.

If only that was gone.

If only that was gone, Aria wouldn't have to suffer anymore.

Thinking that, Evan raised the Holy Sword to strike it down, but,

Clang!

"Ugh...?!"

Evan gasped and widened his eyes at the sensation of striking something hard. A Barrier had been erected in front of him for some reason.

"Wait. It's no use destroying the heart right now."

"...But...!!"

"I know how you feel. You want to quickly cut down that Life Vessel that's tormenting Aria. But..."

Aria wouldn't want you to do things so rashly.

Of course, Aria's decision to come here alone was wrong, but now that things had come to this, they had to catch Maleficent for sure.

"I'm sorry to this child... but I hope she can hold on a little longer."

"That's...!!"

Evan tried to argue with a distorted expression, but nothing she said was wrong.

Even if they purified the Life Vessel here, it wasn't certain whether she would die or not. The Life Vessel was important, but even if they purified it here, Maleficent was likely not to die.

The fact that it was placed in a place like this meant that they had prepared for the possibility of this Life Vessel being destroyed.

It wasn't that Evan didn't know that.

But...

"I need to help her... quickly..."

He wanted to relieve her pain even a little sooner.

Why was that?

He had always been worried about Aria and wanted her not to suffer, but now it was different.

A more... inexplicable poignant feeling, a sad feeling, kept rising, making him feel complicated.

"Don't worry. Aria seems to have fainted, so she won't feel any pain... and the Life Vessel has been weakened by that purification magic from before, so there's no need to worry."

Even with Argent's words that there was no need to worry, Evan looked down at Aria with a guilty expression, feeling that there was nothing he could do.

It was true that she was gradually weakening. Aria, who was receiving infinite Holy Power from the Goddess, was slowly returning to normal, but on the contrary, the Life Vessel was gradually weakening.

It meant that it was weakening due to the Holy Power continuously flowing out of Aria.

"But at this point, it's not difficult to find Maleficent's location."

Argent approached the heart as if it were an opportunity.

Evan was horrified, wondering if she would become like Aria if she touched it, and tried to stop her, but she was faster to put her hand on the heart.

"Don't worry. This much is nothing."

As Argent said, it wasn't a big problem to put her hand on the Life Vessel, which had already been weakened.

Of course, even now, an ordinary person would be corroded by Demonic energy and die painfully just by getting close, but fortunately, she was no

ordinary person.

She was the Archmage who had reached the highest level in this era, the mage of the previous Hero party.

It was absurd to worry about this much.

It was unfortunate for Aria, but as she said, it was important to find Maleficent's location through this Life Vessel and then defeat her for sure.

If it was true that Maleficent was preparing to appear in the academy, as she was sure, then now was the perfect opportunity to defeat her so that she could never be revived.

It wasn't a good idea to interfere here.

Evan lowered his hand, which he had been about to extend to stop Argent, and watched her use tracking magic.

He thought that he would immediately give Holy Power to Aria when it was over.

And...

'I'll completely destroy it.'

When everything was over, he would shatter the heart so that it could never live again.

Evan vowed inwardly.

4 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

Is this what happiness is?

I wore a blissful smile, surrendering myself to the sensation of floating through a dream.

Perhaps it was because I had been living peacefully without any particular suffering for quite some time, but it wasn't easy to come to my senses amidst the immense pain of Demonic energy eroding my body.

This is it…

This is what I've wanted all along.

'It's been a while…'

I had been constantly struggling with various issues, so being healed like this was a rare occurrence.

Of course, I did find joy in everyday happiness, like treating injured students from the swordsmanship department whenever they came to me, but I had never felt as happy as I did now.

I had experienced this level of pain before, but that was only when a high-ranking demon's arm directly pierced my abdomen, and I was eroded by the Demonic energy flowing in.

It was only similar, at best.

But now it's different.

It's not just any Demonic energy, but the Demonic energy of Maleficent, a Demon King Army executive and Argent's adversary, the only great mage in the current Demon King Army, directly burrowing into my body.

I had never felt pain that gave me this much satisfaction.

It was around the time I was enjoying the sense of liberation and the delightful pain, as if swimming in the sea.

- Amazing. To think you'd find my life vessel…

"…"

Ah.

Who is it, really?

Who dares to interrupt my long-awaited moment of freedom and emotion?

As I was about to ask with a voice laced with displeasure, I instinctively recognized that the one speaking to me in such an arrogant tone was no ordinary being.

Judging by the mention of the life vessel…

"Maleficent…"

- You detestable doll of God…!

Why does she sound so angry?

I looked down.

I don't know where this is, but my current state doesn't look good at all. It's clearly not the real world, but a world of consciousness, something difficult to explain theoretically…

But even in such a place, if my other half is shattered, it's clear that I'm in a very dangerous state.

'Hmm…'

But was I just smiling happily until a moment ago?

I couldn't help it.

A chance to enjoy myself to the fullest came along, and it would be wrong not to take it, right?

I've been working hard in my own way, so I deserve this much leeway, don't I?

- Are you truly insane? Even if you are the Saintess chosen by the God you fanatically believe in, standing before you is the great mage lich who has lived for countless years. Did you not think that you would be devoured instead!

“Hehe…”

I see.

I wondered why she seemed so angry, but it's because my actions completely blocked her plan.

Well, it couldn't be helped.

Even in the game, Maleficent's raid is considered cleared just by grabbing and destroying the life vessel hidden somewhere in the academy.

Of course, as a great mage who has lived for countless years, she wouldn't die immediately just because her life vessel was destroyed, and there would be ways for her to survive, so it should have been a tougher and more difficult raid, but we have a deus ex machina, the great mage 'Argen Isis.'

The story cutscene where the protagonist uses the destroyed life vessel to reverse-calculate Maleficent's location and drag her soul with incantations was truly a masterpiece…

Anyway… Even if I'm collapsed like this, my heart is already weakened to the point of breaking…

Even though it looks like this, I poured all my power into it.

No matter how great a mage she is, even if she's of a higher caliber than me, she couldn't have survived unscathed after taking my full power, including two holy relics that enhance my caliber.

Doesn't the lich before me, who I would normally find repulsive and lose my strength just by looking at, look like a complete idiot now?

I chuckled and asked softly.

“Isn’t it… your fault for… attacking the academy…?”

- You, how dare you…!!

Yeah, you must be frustrated~

How does it feel, being so powerful? Drives you crazy, right?

After hundreds of years of planning to completely destroy Argent, her long-time nemesis, to crush the empire's academy and cut off future sprouts, and to neutralize Argent, the main force. Do you think magic to deceive Argent, the Saintess, and even the Hero comes out with a snap of the fingers?

It's obvious that she's been preparing for a long time.

And I effortlessly crushed it.

“Ku, cough… You don’t… even have time to be angry at me… do you…?”

- …!!

“As you know… Evan, cough… if it’s the Hero… if it’s Argent… it wouldn’t be difficult to find… your location… through the life vessel… that I weakened… Keuk, kheeuk?!”

- Haha, that’s rich coming from a damned slave of God…!

“Kehk, kuehk…”

Along with the sensation of my body being further eroded, I felt an incomparable pain.

This… would be enough to drive an ordinary person insane with pain.

It was as if it was making me feel pain, but amplifying the sensation to feel hundreds, thousands of times more pain.

- Now that it has come to this, I shall destroy your mind with pain and offer your soul to that person!!

Th, this.

This is…

Th.

This is…

This is…

Ugh…

Haa…

Hek…♡

This is… something I can't hide even if I wanted to… Deheet…♡

- Why… are you smiling…?

“Hoo, hooh…”

I wonder if my prediction that they would reverse-calculate my location and kill her was correct.

The lich's body, shown in my consciousness, was becoming more and more shattered.

Her power was also weakening.

I had already purified her heart, so she was weakened to the point where she couldn't possibly win, but it's happening faster than I thought.

“Ooh, heuaaaht…?!”

- Unbelievable… This is pain that would drive a human insane, no, destroy their mind itself!!!!

“Haaang…♡”

Feels so good…♡

More, give me more♡

- Wh, what is going on…

“More… please…♡”

- H, hiik…?!

Oh.

She's scared now.

Was my appearance that shocking? The huge face that had been glaring at me with a fierce expression, determined to kill me, was now slowly being overcome with fear.

- What… why… with this much pain, you shouldn't even be able to speak…!!

“M… more…♡”

- Why, why are you making such a pleasurable face!!!!

The lich, who was panicking even as she was dying, looked at me with a terrified expression and shouted.

Masochism.

Masochism engraved in the soul was not easily overcome, no matter how strong the pain. Even if it was a normal human body with the existence of death, they would feel fear as death approached, but

I had an immortal body that wouldn't die unless the Demon King directly attacked my soul and completely annihilated it, preventing even regeneration.

I wouldn't die from feeling this much pain, and I knew that this wasn't the real world, wherever it was.

Probably self-consciousness…

It would be appropriate to call it the world of consciousness.

It wouldn't be a problem no matter how much pain I felt here.

No one is worried, and it's a secret known only to me and Maleficent, right?

- Th, this can't be…

Maleficent's expression, who was muttering as if it couldn't be true, began to harden in real-time.

Did she realize some possibility?

The lich then seemed to realize something, and with a blank expression, the pain that had been tormenting me disappeared in an instant.

- N, no way… no way, you're…!!!

Hmm,

Did she finally find out?

'Ha.'

But does it matter?

The dead tell no tales.

It's not called an assassination for nothing if there are no witnesses.

I gave Maleficent a smile full of satisfaction and said.

“You’re… helping me… until the very end…♡”

Where else could I find such a helpful lich?

A final resistance, you could say.

The lich, who had been trying to kill me mentally until the very end, realized the reality and despaired.

- How, how can such a perverted woman be a Saintess…? The Goddess… must be crazy… This can’t be happening…!

“But it’s true, you know?”

You're experiencing it yourself, even to the point of death, so what's the point of denying it right in front of me?

I sneered at Maleficent.

Looking at me, Maleficent muttered with a blank expression.

- Crazy… bitch…

And with those last words, she disappeared.

It was an anticlimactic end for a Demon King Army executive who had driven the academy to the brink of destruction.

5 - Maleficent Subjugation (5)

“It’s tough…”

Argent said it was hard to face Aria, yet his gaze remained fixed on her heart.

His determination to do something with that heart was undeniable.

“With this… we might be able to find it…”

Seeing the gruesome sight of the girl’s half-melted corpse, Argent’s eyes gleamed as he approached the heart in Aria’s right hand.

He was surrounded by a protective barrier of incantations to ward off the writhing Demonic energy.

“Argen… Headmaster…”

She didn’t have time to ponder what he was trying to do. Judging by his words about finding something, she was sure he was trying to locate the Demon King Army executive named Maleficent through the heart in Aria’s hand.

Hadn’t he said something like that just now?

Using that heart to find the location…?

“…”

Evan wanted to stop him.

If finding it took time… wouldn’t Aria suffer more during that time? Rationally, he knew it was better to find the location and eliminate him for good, but he couldn’t shake that feeling.

However,

“Don’t you want revenge? On that damn skeleton who did this to Aria…”

“…!”

Revenge.

He knew it was a thought a Hero shouldn’t entertain, but the moment he heard the word revenge, Evan’s eyes widened, and he fell into thought.

Was it really okay to do that?

Was that what Aria truly wanted?

While he was struggling to choose, Argent, who had approached the heart, placed his hand imbued with magic close to it and began the reverse calculation.

“…”

Should he have stopped him?

Or should he have urged him to find Maleficent, the one who had turned Aria into this, and kill him?

Evan imagined slicing the Demon King Army executive with the Holy Sword, but he shook his head.

However, he agreed with finding him.

He couldn’t believe that it was being prioritized over healing Aria, but if she was still alive even after her heart was crushed, that was a bigger problem.

Yes, he didn’t particularly want to admit it, but Argen Headmaster was right.

‘What should I do…’

Evan was genuinely conflicted.

He knew it was impossible to stop her even if he tried, but he couldn't bear to see her focusing on the heart in Aria's hand, trying to find Maleficent's location, instead of healing Aria, who was lying there almost like a corpse.

'Now that it's come to this…'

Evan gripped the Holy Sword tightly.

- Evan…

Estel called out to Evan with a worried voice, but Evan couldn't hear her anymore.

Now, all he could do was not miss the moment when that Maleficent revealed himself and strike him with the Holy Sword in his hand.

He wanted to use the skill he had used to defeat the Magic beast back then, but he didn't know how to use it, and it wasn't a suitable attack for this situation.

Then what should he do?

A technique suddenly came to Evan's mind.

A technique that focused on one point by surrounding the sword with a powerful Holy Power sword aura.

It wasn't a widespread attack imbued with Holy Power like the Judgment that summoned a giant sword from the sky or the Hero's skills, which he didn't know much about back then.

A technique that shot a sharply honed blade of powerful God of Purification Holy Power at the speed of light.

It was more appropriate to see it as an assassination technique rather than a technique to defeat someone.

Evan was very familiar with what kind of skill it was and how to gather Holy Power.

As if it were his own limb, he gathered the God of Purification Holy Power into the Holy Sword and created a sword-shaped aura.

It was a small sword aura the same size as the sword, but the power contained within was extraordinary.

‘With this…’

If he fired this, the weakened heart now…

He had a feeling that he might be able to defeat Maleficent, who would reveal himself through Argent.

“…!!”

At that moment.

Demons began to reveal themselves to us.

There were basic low-level demons and mid-level demons in various places.

And…

“Maleficent, you bastard…!!”

A high-level demon revealed himself in the distance.

Unlike them, who had to find the location through the heart, Maleficent could easily find their location.

To prevent them from finding his location, the demons throughout the academy were gathering under his command.

“Tch!”

Argent frowned as she reverse-calculated the location through the heart.

Of all times, the enemy appeared when she was focusing all her attention on the heart.

She could somehow handle the low-level and mid-level demons, but it wasn't easy to deal with the high-level demons.

Just recently, on the day of the entrance ceremony, Argent had to appear in person to barely catch that demon, who was a high-level demon.

You could see how powerful that force was.

High-level demons were unharmed even after being hit with high-level magic.

Considering that you had to hit them with at least basic magic to inflict meaningful damage, it was already difficult to deal with the high-level demon in this place, but there were also low-level and mid-level demons.

Argent clicked her tongue and urgently called out to Stella, Uriel, and Evan.

"Stella, can you help me? Yes, like that… stick close to me. And…"

Uriel and Evan.

Argent looked back at the two of them and raised her hand to cast a spell.

"[Share the Power.]"

The Archmage of Incantations.

Argent briefly delayed the reverse calculation and linked Evan and Uriel together through a magical path.

Close combat was not easy against demons.

Even with magic alone, only professors could easily defeat low-level demons, while mid-level demons had to be taken seriously to be defeated,

and when a high-level demon appeared, several professors had to rush in to barely defeat it with difficulty.

But now the story was very different.

“I’m sorry… If I stop the reverse calculation here and fight that demon, I’ll never be able to find Maleficent again.”

Argent said with a sincere expression of apology.

If she stopped here, Maleficent, who was also an archmage, would definitely create a countermeasure to prevent her from finding him again.

Considering that the one who lost focus would lose in a fight between archmages, linking the two’s magic paths was a big gamble.

Fortunately, Maleficent’s condition wasn’t good, so the magic wasn’t cut off by a brief lapse in concentration, but it was no longer possible to focus on anything else.

“Uriel… if it’s you now, you’ll be able to use Evan’s Holy Power.”

At Argent’s words, Uriel looked down at her sword with a surprised expression.

Holy Power was flowing from the greatsword bestowed by the imperial family.

“Please hold on for a little bit. I’ll find him within 5 minutes.”

5 minutes.

It took 5 minutes in a time attack.

Having to endure for 5 minutes against the demons closing in from all sides was quite despairing, but…

“Stella will help you.”

“Yes…?! But I’m…!!”

“It’s okay. I’ll help you. It would be difficult if Maleficent was in his usual state, but he’s much weaker now thanks to Aria. I can afford to help you.”

Was it okay?

While she was thinking that, the demons had already come within reach.

Evan and Uriel stopped worrying and raised their swords towards the demons.

5 minutes.

They only had to hold on for 5 minutes.

Stella was helping them, so it would definitely be possible.

And…

“Something… feels familiar.”

Was it because of the awakening?

For some reason, he felt like he could wipe them all out even without Uriel’s help.

“Wait a moment.”

Stopping Uriel, who was about to step forward, I stepped forward instead.

Unlike usual, he had achieved his second awakening and was able to use Uriel’s magic.

If it was now…

“…!”

The blade imbued with Holy Power that he had been gathering until just now was shot out in an instant.

In an extremely fleeting moment.

The Holy Power blade, shot at the speed of light, was shot exactly in the direction the high-level demon was walking.

Soon,

Splat!

"…!!"

With a squishing sound, the body of the high-level demon, whose head had disappeared, collapsed.

Uriel, Stella, and all the demons who were watching the scene stared at the fallen high-level demon with hardened expressions.

"Next."

A cold and heavy sensation.

Evan raised the Holy Sword in his hand horizontally and said, extending it towards the demons.

- Kee, keeik…?

It was the beginning of the massacre.

6 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

It was no exaggeration to say he had awakened.

Evan, cutting down the demons blocking his path, reveled in his newfound power.

It wasn't arrogance.

Considering how many times Aria had suffered because he was helpless, he couldn't afford to be arrogant even if he wanted to.

He was simply amazed by the strength he possessed, and determined to ensure that no one could ever harm Aria again.

His mind was solely focused on finding and rescuing Aria from that Maleficent, or whatever he was called.

Evan surveyed the demons before him.

Perhaps because they had witnessed a high-ranking demon fall with a single blow, they seemed hesitant to approach.

He had no intention of sparing any of them.

After all, they were enemies of humanity who had wreaked havoc on the academy he attended.

If they escaped, he would hunt them down and eliminate them.

Evan lowered his stance, holding the Holy Sword horizontally towards the demons.

"If you don't come… I'll go."

Feeling lighter than ever, Evan pushed off the ground and shot forward. Manipulating Holy Power became as natural as using his own limbs, and skills he barely knew surfaced in his mind one by one. He effortlessly sliced through the neck of a low-ranking demon directly in front of him.

- K, ack…?

The demon didn't even realize its neck had been severed, collapsing on the spot. The intense Holy Power residue surged upwards, completely incinerating the demon's head. Only then did the other demons realize.

- Kiek…
- K, krr…
- Kyaaak!!

They were not the hunters, but the hunted.

- Kieeeeeek!!
- Krwooooooo!
- Kiik…

Another demon's neck was severed.

The demons scrambled to escape.

Facing the Hero was no longer an option for them.

Having made that decision, the demons desperately tried to save themselves.

They had no sense of camaraderie.

The dead were simply weak, and the survivors were strong. They were just demons, not comrades, and they were willing to sacrifice each other to survive.

It was common for a mid-ranking demon to grab a low-ranking demon's head and throw it at the Hero.

Evan bisected the low-ranking demon's body flying towards him, then swiftly pursued the mid-ranking demon, severing its legs with a low sweep before slicing its neck as it fell.

Having been beheaded by the Holy Sword imbued with Holy Power, even a mid-ranking demon had no chance of survival.

Leaving the burning, disintegrating mid-ranking demon behind, Evan rapidly traversed the battlefield, cutting down demons one by one. The bewildered demons noticed Uriel, who was staring blankly at Evan.

Thinking they could use her as a hostage to survive, the demons swarmed towards Uriel.

However,

"W-what is it? The demons are coming at me…?!"

Uriel, flustered, raised her greatsword to cut down the approaching demons.

It was a blunt weapon, more suited for crushing than cutting, but she didn't care.

It had always been that way, and she had been using it for a long time.

But…

Thwack!

- K, eeeek…?

The demon couldn't understand.

She was just an ordinary human with no discernible power, so why did he sense Holy Power? It didn't make sense. He looked at his melting body with a bewildered expression and died.

"O-oh…? The demon…?"

Was it her doing?

She had simply swung her sword as before, but seeing the demon's body bisected, Uriel stared at her sword in shock.

'Ah… Argent?'

Come to think of it, Evan had connected their mana paths earlier.

She felt a faint flow of Holy Power within her, and realizing that most of it was flowing into her greatsword, Uriel smiled faintly.

So her ancestor was such a great person.

Before, she could only barely hold on because her sword was ineffective, but now, even a casual swing could easily bisect her opponents.

Uriel raised her sword.

She had nothing to fear now.

"I'll take you on!"

Uriel, filled with determination, dashed forward and instantly cut down another demon who was trying to take her hostage.

What made demons frightening was that swords were ineffective against them unless they were imbued with a proper aura.

In comparison, the power of a low-ranking demon itself was not particularly strong. With that barrier gone, even an ordinary person who didn't know how to wield a sword could accidentally cut them down due to their weakened physical durability.

Of course, ordinary Holy Power wouldn't achieve this.

It was the Holy Power of the 'Hero' that made it so effective.

“… Oops!”

Perhaps she was too focused on cutting down the enemies in front of her, but Uriel belatedly noticed something approaching from behind.

By the time she realized, a demon had already grabbed her from behind and was swinging its Demonic energy-filled claws at her.

At this rate, she would end up just like the demons she had cut down.

Even as she thought that, she couldn't react.

Whoosh!

- Kieeeeeek!!!

A massive flame engulfed the demon.

It thrashed around, trying to extinguish the fire on its body, but the fire melted it even faster.

Uriel stared blankly at Stella, who was watching the demon slowly melt and turn to ash.

Stella also looked surprised, as if she hadn't expected her magic to be so powerful.

“… I, I’ll cover you!”

“Y, yeah!”

Still, the priority now was to eliminate the demons.

Whether the magic had become stronger or it had become easier to fight demons was not a big deal.

Yes, it was definitely not a big deal.

- Krwooooork…

Meanwhile, Evan had even managed to defeat another high-ranking demon.

“Hoo…”

The demons who had denied reality, thinking that the previous victory was just luck, could no longer deny it after seeing the high-ranking demon, who was incomparably stronger than them, fall so quickly.

Yes.

The human before them was someone they couldn't face.

Deciding that, the demons chose to flee completely in order to survive.

The academy,

They had to return to the academy.

It would be more enjoyable to go back to the academy and humiliate and kill the weak humans to their hearts' content. Whether they died here or went back to trample on humans and enjoy a final feast before being killed by Maleficent, it was all the same to them, so they decided it would be better to play to their hearts' content before going.

However,

- Kiek?
- Kik?

That they all had the same thought.

That they had chosen to fly away in order to escape even a little faster.

That was their mistake.

“Where do you think you’re… going?”

Evan, who had been waiting for this, smiled as he gathered Holy Power into the Holy Sword.

It was a chance to use the next skill.

With this, he could wipe them all out.

Convinced of that, Evan swung the Holy Sword imbued with Holy Power without hesitation.

“『Constellation of Purification』”

Immediately after swinging the Holy Sword, the Holy Power soared into the sky and exploded, then gathered into constellations and began to fall.

It was like a comet flying through space, splitting apart and falling as meteors.

And then,

Whoosh!

- Kik?
- K, kiek?
- Kikik?!
- Krwo?

Meteors that would destroy the demons began to rain down.

- Kieeek!
- Krwooooo!
- Kyaaaak!!

Countless low-ranking demons floating in the sky, and even the other demons fleeing in the opposite direction below, were either directly hit by the Holy Power meteorites falling from the sky, or swept away by the explosion of purifying Holy Power that scattered as they fell to the ground.

Evan, who had instantly eliminated all the demons, sheathed the Holy Sword and sighed.

'I've become stronger.'

Incomparably stronger than before.

He had become strong enough to easily face low-ranking to high-ranking demons.

He wasn't sure about the highest-ranking demons, but he would probably find out if he tried.

“Let’s go back.”

All the demons who had been destroying the academy had been eliminated.

Now, all that was left was Maleficent.

Evan, along with Uriel, who was just finishing off the last demon, headed towards where Aria was.

7 - Maleficent Subjugation War

"So it was the 2nd Awakening."

Argen, who had been watching Evan effortlessly subjugate demons with a satisfied smile, turned her head and looked down at her original target, the heart.

She could not forgive this damned lich who dared to attack her academy.

It wasn't just a matter of a day or two.

Especially since she had encountered Maleficent so often during her active Hero party days, the emotions that had built up over hundreds of years were beyond measure.

I will catch her, no matter what.

Her mind was solely focused on finding Maleficent's location.

Unintentionally, she had put Aria's safety on the back burner.

Normally, if she were making a calm and rational decision, she would have prioritized preventing Maleficent from harming Aria before trying to trace Maleficent's location.

But now, she was on the verge of reaching her goal.

An opportunity to end an enemy she had hated for hundreds of years.

A chance to sever this tiresome connection.

The reverse calculation didn't take long.

Maleficent's location was quickly found.

There was no more hesitation.

Argen thrust her fist out and shattered space.

"Get over here, you son of a bitch!!!!"

With a shout of such intensity that it was unimaginable from her usual demeanor, Argen reached into the spatial rift and grabbed Maleficent with magic, pulling her out.

The Demonic energy flowing from the rift was extraordinary.

Evan, standing behind her, swallowed hard, realizing that this was finally the identity of the Demon King Army executive who had been tormenting them.

"Kuaaaak!!"

The space was forcibly torn open, and Maleficent's body was dragged out.

"You again, Argen Isissss!!!"

Thwack!

"Keuh...!!"

Half of Maleficent's skull was brutally shattered, and she groaned.

As a lich, she no longer felt pain, and even if her body was destroyed, she could regenerate as long as her Life Vessel was intact, but the situation was different now.

The Life Vessel was currently being continuously purified by the Saintess.

Maleficent, who was constantly using her power to resist the purification, was not in a favorable situation.

In a situation where her power was limited, defeating an opponent of equal rank like Argen was nearly impossible.

That alone was despairing, but Argen, as well as the Hero behind her, were glaring at her with fierce eyes.

"You... you ruined everything because of you...!!"

"That's what I should be saying?"

Argen said with an incredulous tone, a smile on her face as she finally caught her.

It's really over now.

There was nothing more to see.

Argen intended to end it right there and then, charging magic in her hand.

However,

"Ha, hahaha...!! You better stop...!!"

"...!"

Demonic energy flowed rapidly.

She hurriedly tried to cast a language magic to stop it, but it was already too late. The Demonic energy had already reached the opposite side of Aria's melted half-body.

"Of course, I've become weak... Even being cut by the sword of that weak Hero behind you would shatter my Life Vessel."

"..."

"I've become that weak... But even with the Saintess weakened by my Life Vessel, it's nothing to inflict extreme pain. No matter how immortal she is, her mind is just that of a lowly human. Do you think a fragile human mind can withstand this pain?"

"You, you bastard...!!"

It was a misjudgment.

She should have moved Aria to a safe place first, or prioritized protecting Aria.

Of course, she had ignored Evan's suggestion to prioritize Aria's safety, fearing that she might miss Maleficent if she did so, and had instead focused on finding Maleficent's location first.

Argen bit her lip tightly.

She thought she had improved a lot, but just hearing Maleficent's name made every nerve in her body feel tense.

I ended up messing things up.

'Saintess...'

Argen wanted to ignore Maleficent's threat and take his life.

But Argen knew.

She knew firsthand how difficult the Saintess's life was, and what sacrifices she made.

And she knew how kind and good-hearted the girl named Aria was.

Could she, as the head of the academy, stand by and watch that pure child suffer such pain?

"... What do you want?"

"... Hahaha! Argen has mellowed out a lot. If it were your old self, you wouldn't care about that and just go for it!"

"Keuh..."

I want to kill him.

Argen's expression twisted as she felt her old self resurfacing, but there was little she could do.

It was easy for her to sense what Maleficent was secretly trying to do to Aria.

But the problem was that as a magician of the same level, it was also easy for him to detect any tricks she tried to use.

The moment she tried to do something, he would launch a mental attack.

"Then first, let me go. The attack on the academy will be postponed."

"Damn it...!"

For now, she had no choice but to follow his words.

Was it best to seize the opportunity to move Aria back and desperately attack?

As she pondered how to proceed, about to accept Maleficent's proposal,

Shooook!

"What...!!"

Something was flying towards them.

The moment Maleficent sensed it and tried to inflict pain,

Paang!!

The destruction of Maleficent's Life Vessel was even faster.

"...!!"

Argen's eyes widened as she saw it.

"The Hero... has many useful skills..."

There was Evan, raising his hand filled with the Holy Power of Purification, glowing red like flames.

"Kuaaaak!!"

The Life Vessel was destroyed.

It was now impossible for the lich to exist in this world any longer.

It was only natural since what sustained his life had disappeared.

'Thank goodness...'

Argen muttered inwardly, thinking of quickly apologizing to the two of them.

Unlike an elder... Aria was almost seriously hurt because of her.

If it weren't for Evan, they might have missed Maleficent and only Aria would have suffered... It would have been the worst possible outcome.

However,

'What...'

Something's wrong.

She questioned, looking at Maleficent, who was still maintaining his form even though his Life Vessel had disappeared.

Why is he still alive?

The moment that question arose,

"Ha, hahaha, you foolish fools...!! Did you think I wouldn't have anticipated even this situation...!!"

"Maleficent...!!"

"Hero, from the moment your attack came, I have already inflicted extreme pain on the Saintess you cherish so much. Even if she is accustomed to pain, she won't be able to withstand it...!!"

That can't be.

Argen hurriedly turned her head towards Aria.

As he said, Aria was trying to move her body with a distorted expression.

Argen clenched her fist tightly at the sight of the pitiful girl struggling with her melted half-body.

"You bastard...!!!"

"Demon King...!! I will sacrifice this body to offer the Saintess's broken soul!!"

As he shouted that and slowly faded away,

Aria's trembling body froze.

'Ah...'

She knew what kind of magic Maleficent had cast.

Mind Crush.

A terrifying magic that stimulates extreme pain or mental trauma to shatter the mind and turn it into a blank slate.

He had used his remaining power to cast it on Aria just before he died.

It could be overcome if one had a strong mental fortitude, but the caster was Maleficent, a lich archmage who had lived for countless years.

Even a Saintess with a strong mental fortitude would not be able to withstand it.

Argen gave up hope.

However,

"I, impossible...!!"

The voice of Maleficent, mixed with horror, was heard as he faded away.

"This... This can't be... The Goddess must be crazy... How can this be...!!"

"What...?"

"The pain a human can endure can't be like this!!"

Argen hurriedly turned towards Aria.

The Holy Power, the proof of faith, remained.

If her soul was broken, the Holy Power should no longer be generated in that body. Since she was no longer the Saintess's blessed body, she would die with her melted half-body as it was.

But,

"It's... recovering..."

The Holy Power was getting stronger.

The melting half-body was recovering.

"This... This can't be happening..."

Argen, looking down at Maleficent, who had only a small part of him left, couldn't say anything.

The strength of this generation's Hero and Saintess was beyond imagination.

Especially that girl, Aria.

"Is this... what they call a miracle..."

Faith in God.

Was the boundless love for humanity, that affection, the driving force that allowed her to endure the pain?

The girl, who had endured even the pain that would have instantly broken an ordinary person, was lying quietly on the floor with a happy smile.

The lich archmage, who had relentlessly spewed hatred towards God, muttered as he faced his end with a hollow expression.

"Crazy... bitch..."

He was looking at a pure girl that an undead who hated God could never understand.

8 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

It's over… I guess.

I don't know exactly how things turned out since I came back after resting in the consciousness space, but the Maleficent subjugation was successful, and the academy is safe…

Above all, it seems that everything was resolved well without any harm to the students, thanks to me.

Well, even if I don't know about other things, I saw Maleficent die with my own two eyes.

I could say for sure that she was dead.

Because she completely disappeared…

If she were still alive after all that, it would be amazing in its own right…

When I asked how they managed to catch Maleficent, they said that, as I expected, they traced her heart back to find her and forcibly dragged her to where we are now.

Well, that's a sure way to catch her…

Basically, a lich can only exist in the world if they have a mana organ called a life vessel, which can be called a heart for humans.

But if that gets destroyed, it's safe to say that most liches just die.

That's right, but since the opponent isn't an ordinary lich mage but a great mage, isn't it possible that she took some measures to avoid dying?

So, I just thought that if we were going to finish her off, it would be right to bring her here and kill her for sure.

I don't know how it happened because I didn't see it with my own eyes.

Anyway, it's a relief that the subjugation was successful and no one was hurt.

…

No, what did I just say?

'No one was hurt, which means there's no one I need to heal…'

This is a sad and unfortunate story, not something to be glad about.

Of course, an ordinary Saintess would sincerely think it's a good thing, but I'm not an ordinary Saintess, am I?

I just want to heal as many people as possible.

Did I prepare too much?

'I don't think I did anything.'

I'm serious, not lying.

I really didn't do anything.

I just told Argent that it would be good to prepare for Maleficent's attack soon.

After that, Argent did everything on her own.

That wasn't all.

'He's awakened.'

For some reason, Evan even succeeded in his second awakening.

I don't think he awakened this early in the game, so I couldn't believe he could awaken so quickly.

What is it?

Usually, even if you play with that necklace in the game, you can't awaken this quickly if you play normally.

Usually, the second awakening could be done in the second year.

He hasn't even finished the first year yet, but he's already awakened, so I'm surprised and also excited.

If it's Evan, he might really succeed in subjugating the Demon King.

Well… I don't know why I came to this world, but I know that I can't return to my original world unless I subjugate the Demon King.

If the world is destroyed, I'll probably die with it.

That's why I've been running until now.

"Are you okay?"

Evan, who had come close to me, asked, holding out his hand to me.

It wasn't just Evan.

Stella, Uriel, and Argent also came to me and were sending me worried glances.

"Ah… can't they see…?"

He asked me if I was okay and held out his hand, but after a while, he seemed to think that I had used up all my Holy Power, and he hesitated whether to take back the hand he had held out.

Well, if you see me collapsed from Demonic energy, you might think I've used up all my Holy Power.

I shook my head.

"[I can hear you… I'm glad everyone is safe.]"

It wasn't that I used up all my Holy Power and was hit by the life vessel, but that Maleficent's Demonic energy was too strong and I was pressured.

Of course, I didn't use up all my Holy Power.

Most of the Holy Power I used to purify the heart at that time was the Holy Power I had been collecting all along.

Since I can store Holy Power inside the Relic, I had been saving it in case I didn't have enough power now, but I almost had a big problem.

Seeing that my Holy Power is still at a precarious level, if I hadn't stored Holy Power in the Relic, I might have lost.

Of course, with Argent next to me, I wouldn't have lost, but I could have expected some damage.

Thanks to the thorough preparation that could be evaluated as perfect, I was able to wrap up this incident without major damage.

I'm glad.

I should be glad, but…

"Haa… another big problem."

Argent, who had been standing on the side where Maleficent died for a long time, suddenly sighed and said.

When Stella next to her asked if there was any problem, she pointed to the academy as if asking what was obvious.

Only then did Stella realize why she was reacting like that.

But…

"There aren't any students who were seriously injured, and none of the professors died, right? Isn't it amazing that we caught even a member of the Demon King Army without any damage like this?"

Stella explained to Uriel, who asked with a pure expression.

Well, it's natural for Argent to react so sadly.

It's definitely something to be happy about that the incident ended safely without anyone getting hurt, but that doesn't mean that the incident itself disappears.

Anyway, the fact remains that a member of the Demon King Army, a great mage, directly led his forces to attack Argent Academy, where she is the headmaster.

The academy, which had set up a barrier and swore that it would never be attacked, has collapsed to this extent, so it's obvious how the world will think of Argent Academy.

It won't collapse immediately because of its reputation and because Argent, the mage of the Hero party that sealed the Demon King and one of the few great mages in the current era, is the headmaster…

But it was clear that she would be more annoyed.

"I don't want to be bothered any more than this…"

"Aha…"

"Haa…"

While Argent was sighing and Stella was explaining Argent's situation to Uriel, someone came to my side.

"Aria."

It was Evan.

"Can you stand up?"

Well, I can stand up, but…

'Evan probably doesn't want me to be able to stand up on my own.'

He didn't see what happened here with his own eyes, but it's also true that Evan awakened for me…

Above all, he explained it to me to some extent.

I heard that it was Evan who took advantage of Maleficent's weakness and broke her heart.

It would have been a disaster if it wasn't for Evan.

In the end, he made a sad expression, saying that he had no choice but to give me so much pain.

Um, actually, I felt really good, but everyone was so sorry that I had suffered such pain.

There's no need to be.

'But I can't say I felt good…'

I even heard Maleficent call me a crazy bitch, so it would have been a disaster if the opponent hadn't died.

Anyway…

'It's okay to give him a little service, right?'

He did so much for me.

It wasn't even something to call service.

Rather, I felt sorry for him because it felt like I was burdening Evan with a troublesome load.

I chuckled inwardly and said to Evan as if I was really troubled.

"[… I don't think I can right now…]"

“… Is that so?”

I entrusted my body to Evan, who was carefully supporting me…

Entrusted…

Ent…?

'Huh.'

What is this.

At first, I thought he was just trying to support me, but why does it feel like my body is being lifted higher…?

"How is this? Are you okay?"

“…!!!”

I was being held in Evan's arms in a princess carry.

Uh… I didn't mean to say I couldn't get up on purpose to get this…

But I couldn't tell him to put me down right away because I had said that I couldn't get up until just now, and Evan's expression felt so serious that I felt guilty for joking around.

In the end, I couldn't tell him to put me down and just nodded slightly.

'I shouldn't play with these scenes next time…'

Still, something…

It's comfortable to be held like this, and…

'Is it because of the awakening…?'

It felt very warm, so it wasn't a bad feeling.

Yeah… really.

9 - Maleficent Subjugation Battle

The Demon King Army executives' large-scale invasion of the academy ended absurdly, with a miracle occurring where not a single death occurred.

Originally, the story was supposed to be that the academy would suffer great damage from the countless waves of demons, be occupied, and slowly expand their territory until they finally found and barely managed to subdue Maleficent, but it had completely changed.

The academy could be rebuilt quickly if it was destroyed, and not only did all the students escape unharmed, but the professors, who had prepared in advance, responded well to the demons. The prestige of Argent Academy was soaring to the sky.

So much so that there was even a conspiracy theory that Argen Headmaster had deliberately orchestrated the whole thing to raise the status of Argent Academy.

Of course, the students who had been in the midst of the chaos dismissed it as nonsense, saying that there was no way the academy would be ruined, but the imperial family of the empire was overjoyed.

It is said that the best news is no news, but thanks to the appropriate response of the headmaster, students, and professors, they not only subdued Maleficent, an executive of the Demon King Army who had plagued humanity for many years, but also suffered no casualties except for the destruction of the academy building.

The prestige of the academy, as well as the empire to which it belonged, could only rise day by day.

It was already happy enough, but the prestige rose even further when it was revealed that Uriel, the imperial princess of the empire, had also participated in the subjugation of Maleficent.

She went around saying that she hadn't done much, but... how many people would believe that?

Most people just thought that Uriel was downplaying herself.

"Haa..."

I'm lying in a hospital room again.

Should I call this fortunate?

Most of the injured kids had minor injuries and could be treated quickly, and most of the students were transported to a safe place via bracelet, so there was no one I needed to treat.

In the first place, even though the academy was devastated by the large-scale invasion, it was only natural that there were no dead students, let alone professors.

It would be different if it was just one person, but several professors were together, and most of the students were teleported without having to go to save them, and the students outside were on the outskirts, so they only encountered low-level demons and had no problem escaping.

Although they had prepared, it was a situation that could be called a miracle.

If you ask me if it's a miracle for me, I don't know.

The reason is simple.

My abilities get stronger and I can feel the small joys of everyday life when there are students to treat.

Well, still...

'This is satisfying enough...'

Maleficent gave me so much right before she died that I was satisfied enough not to feel any pain for a while.

I'd say it was the highest level of pain I'd ever experienced.

It was hard to rate.

I was so happy that I lost consciousness on the spot.

I had never felt pain strong enough to make me faint before, even though I had felt all sorts of pain.

The most intense was when I was pierced by a high-level demon's hand and injected with Demonic energy on the day of the entrance ceremony, but this time I experienced something even worse.

I'm embarrassed that I'm dividing the levels of pain and being satisfied with feeling it...

'Is it because it's going to be peaceful for a while now...'

Nothing will happen until the end of the first year and the beginning of the second year, so I feel disappointed.

Of course, realistically, it's best if nothing happens...

'I should go to the Holy Kingdom this vacation...'

I went to the Holy Kingdom just recently, but I had things to do then, so I couldn't stay long.

Unlike then, I don't have anything to do now, so I can go back to the cathedral and rest for a long time.

After finishing thinking about what to do in the future, I turned to the side.

"Aria..."

Seeing Stella, who took care of me until the end even though I told her I was okay, this is really...

It's a complicated feeling.

"Huh...?"

Stella, who seemed to have just woken up, looked around with a dazed expression and looked at me.

I was already awake, so I waved at Stella.

"Are, are you okay? How's your body?!"

Stella's eyes widened and she asked me urgently.

What do you mean, how am I?

Even if the opponent is Maleficent, I'm still a Saintess... There's no way I, who is practically the incarnation of the Goddess, would suffer permanent disabilities from a mere lich archmage.

"[I'm fine. I'm just glad that Stella doesn't seem to be hurt.]"

"...You really...!!"

"[Ah...]"

Stella's eyes welled up with tears and she hugged me tightly.

She muttered that she was so glad.

Um...

'It's a bit late for me to say this, but I think I've shown her all sorts of things so far, so why is her reaction so extreme?'

I've seen things worse than my body melting from Maleficent's Demonic energy, so I don't understand why she's so worried about me.

Is it because of the opponent?

Well, my body's regeneration wasn't progressing for a while because of the Demonic energy, and I was resting in the consciousness space because of my melting half-body.

It's not like I wanted to go in, and I think it was because of Maleficent...

"[Did something happen? It's been a while since Stella has been so worried about me.]"

"Th, that's..."

"I'll explain."

Ah.

When did she get here?

The person who opened the door and rushed in was none other than Argen Isis.

Not only her, but Evan and Uriel were also walking in.

"You're finally awake. How's your body? Is there anything uncomfortable?"

"[Of course. I feel rather comfortable?]"

"Hoo... I'm glad to hear that. You're showing such a normal reaction that I'm starting to suspect that you're lying on purpose."

Judging from Argen's reaction, it seems that Maleficent did something to me right before she died.

She gave me tremendous pain until the moment of her death, and then she found out my true nature and died with a hollow expression.

"[I guess something did happen.]"

"...Yes. There's no point in hiding it, so I'll get straight to the point. That guy cast Mind Crush on you."

Ah, I know that magic.

It was in the game too.

It was a mental magic, and if you mastered it, you could collapse the mind of an opponent of a similar or lower level and cheese the boss battle.

Most boss battles have stronger opponents than me, so if you raise your character normally, you can't even learn the magic, let alone cast it.

According to the setting, you can manipulate the mind with magic to make them no longer human, erase their memories, etc...

You can do things that are chilling just to hear about.

However, you can't do delicate manipulations such as erasing a certain part of your memory.

And she cast that on me?

'No wonder I felt such pain.'

It was strangely strong to be called pain that normally gives me pain.

If it was a normal person, their mind would have collapsed in an instant.

Well, I almost had my mind collapse in a different sense because the pleasure was too strong.

I can say that I survived because the threshold for pleasure is higher than for pain.

"Before I explain, I want to apologize first."

"[Yes?]"

"My desire for revenge caused you great pain. Although you endured it, it was pain that you wouldn't have had to experience if I had given up my desire for revenge."

Argen came to me, made eye contact with me for a moment, and then bowed.

"I'm really sorry."

The other kids around me were looking at Argen with shocked expressions, probably because they didn't expect her to come up to me and bow.

I was also flustered because I didn't know she would be so sorry to me.

I felt a sense of disconnect from the Argen I knew.

I waved my arms wildly with a flustered expression and said it was okay.

Even though I told her to raise her back like this, she was still silent and continued to ask me for forgiveness with her back bowed.

"[It's burdensome...]"

Actually, it's not just that it's burdensome, but she really didn't need to apologize to me.

That is, if she hadn't been burning with revenge, I wouldn't have tasted that heaven.

'I'm really okay...'

I can't say that again.

I sighed inwardly, wondering what to do.

It's so hard to maintain the concept, really...

Maleficent Subjugation (Interlude)

"So, he said he had to save Aria first and tried to stop me from using tracking magic."

Oh, is that so?

If it were before, I would have thought, 'As expected of the Hero,' or 'He's such a kind friend who cares more about others,' but knowing the inside story, I couldn't help but interpret his words differently.

Ironically, it seems I'm the only one who knows that Evan likes me.

No, Stella is quick-witted, so maybe she already knows that Evan likes me.

Argent, judging by his reaction, seemed to have noticed it a long time ago.

"[Hehe… I see.]"

So that's how it is.

Seeing him care for me so much, I felt like I should start responding to his kindness.

Of course, I sometimes just call him Evan, but because of my persona, I usually call him Brother Evan.

Maybe he's unhappy with me about that.

I turned my head slightly to let Evan know that I was looking at him.

Well, even if I didn't turn my head to look at him, I could see everything Evan was doing, but there's a big difference between looking directly and not, right?

It's a habit I've had since long ago.

"[Evan…?]"

"Uh, uh?"

"[I heard you succeeded in your Awakening. Congratulations.]"

"Ah, no… If it weren't for you, I wouldn't have been able to Awaken in the first place…"

Well, I wasn't praising him to hear those words, but…

It wasn't exactly wrong either.

It seems Awakening would have been impossible without me.

I listened to the explanation of what had happened since that incident and how the situation had unfolded. Apparently, he Awakened after seeing me collapse while trying to purify his heart.

I don't know what he was thinking when he Awakened, but anyway, it's thanks to me that he Awakened, and considering that we have to defeat the Demon King in the future, it's better for him to Awaken as soon as possible…

I should think of this as fortunate.

'At this rate of growth, he might actually fully Awaken around his second year.'

In the original setting, I know that Awakening takes a very long time.

Mental maturity, physical strength, and other factors need to reach a certain level.

Looking back at history, there are many Heroes with low aptitude who barely managed to defeat the Demon King after a journey of more than a decade, achieving their final Awakening. Considering that Evan was a novice Hero who hadn't even achieved his first Awakening until a little less than a year ago…

It's only been a year, and he's already finished his second Awakening and is on the verge of his final Awakening, which shows how hard Evan has been working.

Of course, it's a setting where his power becomes one step stronger, and he can use new skills in the game, so it's only natural that Awakening is difficult.

Thinking about it that way, Evan is working incredibly fast, even more diligently and desperately than I expected…

He has reached the point where he can defeat not only lower-level demons but also mid-level and high-level demons.

Now, Evan only needs to Awaken one more time.

Three times was the maximum in the game.

'And all of this was to save me…'

The first Awakening was to weaken the Magic beast, but it was an Awakening to save me, who was directly eaten by the Magic beast.

The second Awakening was to save me, who sacrificed myself by throwing myself at Maleficent to weaken her heart.

'At this point…'

I carefully observed Evan.

Even now, Evan is looking at me with a worried expression.

I don't know why he likes me so much.

Looking at what he's shown me so far… he feels like the Saintess herself, but if you ask me if I've had such a big impact on Evan that he would do this much for me, I don't know.

I can understand him feeling guilty or sorry for not being able to protect me, but…

Or maybe he's worried about me overworking my body.

Parts of my body flying away are basic, and I've shown him shocking scenes like my body melting, having huge holes in it, or even being torn to shreds so that nothing remains.

Even though I've shown him such shocking scenes that would make anyone want to throw up, he still likes me and is even Awakening to save me, so I'm starting to change my mind.

It's not that I dislike Evan.

Honestly…

From a rational point of view, if I were really a woman, it wouldn't be strange for me to have fallen for Evan a long time ago, he's been so devoted to me.

The only reason that's not the case is, as it may sound cliché, because I was a man.

'A man…'

A man, huh?

I can't even remember it well anymore.

If I had tried to remember my previous world and lived peacefully after coming to this world, it might be different, but now it's been almost three years since I've been living as the Saintess.

It's quite a long time if you think about it, but if you ask me if I've forgotten my memories of my previous world, I can say that's not the case.

I still remember my previous world.

But…

'It's fading…'

Perhaps it's because the three years I've spent here have been so significant to me.

Well… it's been three years filled with pleasure, but it seems to have had a big impact on me, but it didn't feel that significant.

Anyway… there's no one waiting for me.

'Why… did I want to go back?'

What was the reason I wanted to go back?

That thought suddenly occurred to me.

I vaguely set a goal to catch the Demon King and go back, but in reality, I had no reason to go back.

At best, it would be to enjoy the culture of my original world and play around.

I had a lot of money, so…

'That's why I played the game even harder, but…'

Now that I think about it, there's nothing good about going back.

"Aria?"

Is going back the right thing to do?

Is that really what I want now?

Of course, you could say, 'What about all the hard work you've done so far?' but…

'Anyway, if I don't defeat the Demon King, I'll die anyway…'

I worked hard to go back, but it was more about trying not to die.

After all, the only way to find a way back is to defeat the Demon King.

Maybe everything I've been working on so far wasn't to go back, but to not die.

I feel pleasure from pain, but even I don't want to die.

"Aria!"

"[Yes, yes?!]"

Ah, did you call me?

I was so lost in my own thoughts that I didn't even notice Evan calling me.

"Sorry… I think I was bothering you too much when you must be tired."

"[Huh? Ah, no. I was just thinking about something.]"

Evan looked relieved at my words.

However…

"Still, you must be very tired, so get some rest today."

"[Ah…]"

Well… I am tired.

Maleficent's Demonic energy came directly into my body and messed around, so I still have some aftereffects.

Of course, it's not a serious aftereffect, just a little tired.

Evan got up from his seat and looked around, saying it was time to leave.

Stella, who had been nursing me until I woke up, didn't want to leave, but he forcibly dragged her out, saying that Aria would worry if she kept staying up all night.

Hmm.

Well, it doesn't matter if they're in the room, but…

'Evan…'

I also have something to think about.

I watched with my own eyes as Evan and everyone else left the room, and when the room became quiet, I turned my head back to the front and bowed deeply.

Evan likes me.

But… do I like Evan?

I put my hand on my chest.

Humans are said to rely heavily on sight.

There is a big difference between what you can see and what you can't, and I am experiencing it directly, so it's an undeniable fact.

Is the reason I don't want to love a man, the reason I can't love a man, because I don't find Evan attractive to my eyes?

But if that's the case, how can I perceive and judge such a thing when I can't see?

What is my purpose?

My purpose was originally to return home.

But now, I'm just acting like the Saintess, adopting a persona to pursue pleasure and return home.

On the one hand, I also want to save people who are suffering.

The desire to save people and the me who enjoys pleasure.

Which one is the real me?

I closed my eyes.

This question… seemed like it would continue for a while.

1 - Return Home

The daily life continued even after Maleficent's attack.

Maleficent's attack was certainly significant, but unfortunately for the Demon King Army, it didn't cause a major stir.

It was true that the academy building was damaged, but only the building was slightly ruined. There were no casualties, everyone was defeated, and even the Lich Grand Wizard, Maleficent, who had terrified the continent, was subjugated.

Most of the people in the empire cheered, chanting Argent's name and the empire.

The subjugation of a Demon King Army executive was a joyous occasion that warranted a celebration in itself.

Conversely, the academy building was indeed significantly damaged, so the headmaster, at his discretion, decided to suspend exams and bring the vacation forward, judging that it was impossible to continue proper classes.

So… thanks to this attack, the exams that were supposed to be taken disappeared, and the vacation started early.

The students were confused, but they acknowledged that it was a great thing that no one died, and exceptionally gave everyone full marks on their exams.

Some students liked it, while others didn't, but it couldn't be helped.

The academy was already completely ruined, so how could they continue classes there?

Holding classes elsewhere was not an option, as there was no place with facilities as good as Argent Academy, and traveling to another location for

exams and classes would be a major hassle, taking anywhere from a few days to several weeks.

Therefore, it was decided to continue the suspension of classes at their discretion.

As someone who never intended to take the exams properly in the first place, it was a good outcome for me.

As I walked, lost in thought, a vast plain unfolded before me.

Like a child who had discovered something amazing, I rushed forward eagerly.

"S, Saintess!"

"[It's been a while since I've seen so much snow~]"

I ran around outside like an excited child, saying that.

It was now the last month of the year.

December 25th.

In this world, it was a day to commemorate the Goddess's creation of this world and the birth of the three sibling gods who shared her power.

"Saintess, please be careful not to fall."

"[Hehe, Danas, really. As if I would fall… Kyaa!]"

Crack!

"..."

"Didn't I tell you…"

No, this is a bit unfair.

I'm somewhat relieved… no, I can't say I'm entirely relieved because I didn't feel the pain of cracking my head when I fell, but anyway, I fell on a pile of snow, so I didn't feel much of an impact.

"[Umm… I'm sorry…]"

I thought I wouldn't fall because I could easily detect things like rocks with Divine Detection, but when I thought about it, the fact that the snow was slippery didn't change, so if I wasn't careful, I would just slip and fall.

I didn't expect to slip…

I should have walked more carefully if I had known this would happen.

"Are you okay, Aria?"

"[Ah… I'm okay. Thanks to the pile of snow, I'm not hurt anywhere.]"

I smiled and answered Evan, who asked with a worried voice.

I wasn't actually hurt anywhere, so I smiled brightly and lay down on the ground again.

"S, Saintess?!"

"[I've always wanted to lie down in a fluffy snowfield like this!]"

"Aren't you cold? I can give you my coat…"

"[I'm already wearing enough, so you don't have to worry, Danas.]"

My clothes were even enchanted with warming magic to prevent me from feeling the cold, so it was impossible to feel the coldness of the snow unless I touched it directly with my hands.

Geez… everyone worries too much.

I guess they didn't expect me to lie down in the snowfield.

"[Snow… it feels kind of strange.]"

"Strange feeling?"

"[I've felt a lot of snow in the Demon Realm where blizzards raged… but I was too busy saving people back then. I couldn't even open my eyes because of the snow, so should I say I was too busy to even open my nose?]"

"..."

It was a hilarious joke, but Evan didn't laugh.

Tsk, what an insensitive guy.

"[Lying here leisurely like this, I feel anew how fluffy the snow is.]"

"... I see."

"[… Your reaction isn't very good. Do you not like being with me?]"

I asked in a somewhat sad voice, wanting to play a little prank, and Evan, surprised, hurriedly replied that it wasn't like that.

He had become much more gentle and somewhat colder after his Second Awakening, but seeing this, it didn't seem like that was the case.

Well… Awakening itself was said to be a maturation of the mind, so it wasn't that strange for his personality to change a little, but Evan felt different.

It felt like he had suddenly gained the experience of living several more years.

"[Then, would you like to lie down next to me?]"

"Huh?"

"[Hurry.]"

"Ah, okay."

Evan answered with a bewildered voice at my words and lay down next to me.

I can't see the sky, but Evan can see the dark sky well.

As the Hero, he will be able to see the dark night as clearly as day.

"[How is the night sky?]"

"... It's beautiful."

"[Is that so…]"

I'm jealous.

I want to see it too.

I feel like I want to lie here with just the two of us.

I came outside with just the two of us, secretly from Stella.

If Stella finds out, she'll definitely make a fuss about why we left her out.

I should stay for a while and then go back.

Ah, come to think of it, there was a hidden contributor to being able to sneak out like this.

"[Brother Danas. Thank you for indulging my whims today.]"

I offered my thanks to Danas, who was quietly watching me and Evan from behind.

Danas replied as if it was nothing.

"... I can't refuse what the Saintess asks. You are my life's savior, after all."

Life's savior, he says.

It's not the time to say that in this situation.

I sighed deeply as I looked at Danas.

Danas probably didn't notice my gaze.

I feel like he's become more frustrating than before since he became a paladin and got married.

To put it nicely, he's become more gentle, and to put it badly, he's just become an old geezer.

Seeing him bow his head and say that he can't treat his life's savior badly in a pleasant situation, I was confident that everyone would think the same way I do.

It wasn't wrong, but I didn't expect that kind of answer, so I replied in a slightly sulky voice.

"[Hmm… Did I put too much pressure on you? That's not what I meant.]"

"I, I was being presumptuous. I'm sorry."

"[Ugh… I don't know why everyone is so formal…]"

Strangely, everyone fawns over me when I come to the Holy Kingdom.

I didn't exactly want this when I returned home, so it's a shame.

"Aria."

"[Yes?]"

"You know… if you subjugate the Demon King…"

Evan seemed to be about to say something, but he stopped for a moment.

I wondered if he was going to ask what I wanted to do after subjugating the Demon King, or if he wanted me to answer his confession back then.

"... It's nothing. Sorry."

Evan didn't say anything more and turned his head back to look at the sky, saying it was a slip of the tongue.

Well, he didn't seem to want to talk about it right now, so there was no reason to persistently ask.

"[It would have been nice if Uriel had come with us…]"

"Well, Uriel is a princess… so she probably went back to the imperial family."

"[Seeing it like this, I feel anew that Uriel is a princess.]"

Evan smiled and replied.

Uriel had initially tried to invite us to the imperial family, but Stella said that it would be a disaster if the people of the Magic Tower discovered her in such a troublesome place, and I had to return to the Holy Kingdom first, so we had no choice but to refuse.

Evan originally had nowhere to return to, and he had declared that he would follow me wherever I went, so unfortunately, Uriel had to part ways with us.

It must have been like a bolt from the blue for Uriel, who was planning to return to the imperial family together during this vacation and have fun.

You can tell just by how sadly she cried when we parted.

Well, I had already sent a letter saying that I would return to the Holy Kingdom, so there was no turning back.

"[Maybe it would be good to accept Uriel's invitation after we've had enough vacation in the Holy Kingdom. I think she must be very

heartbroken.]"

"That might not be a bad idea."

I nodded at Evan's words.

I should do that for Uriel's sake.

December 25th.

The night of the birth of the Goddess passes.

We are currently spending our vacation in the Holy Kingdom of Valkan.

Except for Uriel.

2 - Homecoming

"Where were you guys?"

"Well, we just went out for some fresh air...?"

I was caught.

I had sneaked out while Stella was sleeping, but as soon as I returned, Stella woke up and asked where I had been.

If I had known I would be caught like this, I should have taken Stella with me.

"[I'm sorry, Stella... I didn't want to wake you, so I just went out secretly.]"

"Ah... is that so?"

"[Would it be better to just wake you up next time?]"

"Um..."

At my question, Stella seemed to glance at Evan for a moment before answering that it was okay.

Why did she suddenly look at Evan before answering?

'It can't be that she likes Evan.'

Before, I might have indulged in wishful thinking, wondering if they liked each other, but I already knew that Evan liked me...

More than that, I belatedly realized that there wasn't much reason for Stella to like Evan.

I thought that Stella didn't seem to like Evan that much anymore...

'Hmm... or is she?'

Considering that she wouldn't be so concerned about Evan otherwise, I felt confused. What if Stella actually liked Evan, but was bothered by the fact that Evan and I went outside alone together?

'It could be confusing.'

I didn't think Stella would do that, but if she felt jealous that I secretly took only Evan out and something happened between us, wouldn't it just be a hassle for me?

I don't want any trouble.

I turned from Evan to Stella.

I don't want that...!

"[Don't worry, Stella, I went out with Danas.]"

"Oh... uh, okay."

Stella replied with a somewhat flustered expression at my words.

That's enough.

From what I said, it might seem like I was telling her not to worry about us going out alone, but the underlying meaning was that Danas was with us, so nothing like what she was thinking happened.

Stella would understand.

Couldn't I tell just from the flustered expression she was giving me?

That should be enough, right?

Even if not, Stella, being smart, would quickly realize why I was saying this.

"..."

Stella, however, was looking at Evan for some reason.

She seemed to be giving him a strangely pitiful look, but I didn't know why.

Well, it didn't seem like something I needed to worry about.

"It's been a while."

"[It's been a while, Grandpa.]"

Since it was a private meeting, I smiled brightly and hugged him as if I were meeting my real grandfather.

I always think this whenever I'm hugged like this, but it's a strange feeling.

No matter how much I look around, no matter how much I touch him, he only looks like an ordinary grandfather, but his true identity is actually the Light Guardian Dragon.

Even I, who am directly seeing it with Divine Power Detection, can't believe it, so how much more would the people around me? Perhaps the only people who know his true identity are Argent and me, who naturally found out while playing the game in my past life.

But even I, who already know his true identity, honestly just see him as a grandfather when I look at Grandpa now, and I don't see him at all as the top-tier SSS-class Guardian Dragon beauty hiding his identity, so I feel confused.

I've become so used to bypassing the All-Seeing Eyes that she possesses, so I smiled brightly and asked if he had finished his work well.

"I should have come sooner, but things took longer than I thought. I'm sorry."

"[It's okay. I'm going to rest for a long time anyway.]"

Since I came to the Holy Kingdom, I should rest for a long time.

I was also thinking of looking around the capital.

It's Barkhan's capital, so there are probably few people desperate enough to need my help, but there's also the off chance...

When I was in the capital before, I was so busy training my powers as a Saintess that I didn't get to look around properly, so I wanted to do some sightseeing.

"How is your body? I heard you were seriously injured when you caught the Demon King Army executive..."

Grandpa asked with a worried voice.

It felt very new.

Especially being worried about like this directly by Grandpa, of all people.

Until now, I had been worried about by the other knights of the Demon Realm or by my friends at the academy.

It felt different than usual.

"[It's okay. I'm used to it.]"

After saying that, I felt a little like I messed up because I said I was okay because I was used to the pain...

But there shouldn't be a big problem.

As Grandpa said, I was seriously injured this time.

If my body was torn apart or disappeared without a trace, I could say that I was less injured.

For ordinary people, this would be a bigger wound, but for me, who can heal it easily, it's not a big problem.

As long as I'm still in the Saintess state, it's not a big problem to be injured to that extent.

Regardless of mental problems, wounds can be healed easily.

But this time, I was dealing with a high-ranking existence, none other than a Demon King Army executive... If I had tried to stop Maleficent with my own power instead of the Relic, I would have been much more seriously injured than I am now.

I might have been lying down until the end of the vacation.

It was only thanks to obtaining the Relic beforehand and gathering Holy Power in the Relic to neutralize the heart that I didn't go that far, so it's just a guess.

Anyway, as Grandpa said, it's true that I was seriously injured, but I replied that I was okay.

If I, of all people, caught a Demon King Army executive with just one injury, wouldn't that be a huge gain?

Of course, there are people who don't think so, but at least I think it's a huge gain.

I can't tell people the reason why, though.

Who would say that they don't care because they like being in pain?

Even if I'm someone who likes being in pain, at least I'm not...

Well... if I get that kind of attention, it would be enjoyable in its own way, but I'm currently playing the role of a Saintess.

My future plans would be fundamentally twisted.

I don't want that to happen.

That's all.

"... That's not true, Aria."

"[Huh?]"

"Just because you're used to it doesn't mean the wound disappears."

Grandpa put his hand on my head with a pitiful expression.

A subtle and warm sensation passed by.

"You can rest if you're tired."

"[G-Grandpa...?]"

"I sometimes think. When I first met you back then, shouldn't I have brought you as a Saintess?"

Oh, I didn't know that at all.

Of course, it's probably because I showed potential as a Saintess that he took me.

Otherwise, there would be no reason to take me.

Of course, he has such a kind heart that he would have taken in a child with a disability walking on the street out of pity, so if I didn't have the potential to be a Saintess, he would have allowed me to live as a nun in the cathedral.

Well... not being able to see wouldn't have been that difficult to live with since he would have made it so that I could hear with Thought-form and distinguish my surroundings with Divine Power Detection, like now.

But...

"Blinded by your potential as a Saintess, I might have plunged you into the abyss... It's an impious thought that I shouldn't dare to have towards the Goddess... but she's a generous person, so she'll surely forgive me."

"[Ah...]"

"I'm always sorry to you, Aria, for making you carry such a heavy burden."

Seeing him say that with a truly self-deprecating expression, I wondered if I had made him like this.

'Did I overdo it?'

Come to think of it, as soon as I became a Saintess, I was blinded by lust, no, pleasure, and wandered around without caring about what happened to my body...

I didn't care at all at the time that it might look strange.

But unlike my enjoyable inner thoughts, Aselina, who always saw my body being damaged and in pain, seemed to have developed a sense of skepticism.

He even made Aselina, who was directly created and had absolute faith in the creator, have such impious thoughts.

'Was I... that bad...?'

Suddenly, I had that thought and briefly looked back on my past actions, and I nodded slightly without anyone knowing.

'It's plausible enough.'

Even if I looked for past Saintesses, there was no Saintess who saved everyone they saw...

Of course, who wouldn't be afraid when their own body is hurt that much and they feel pain?

Somehow... I feel sorry for everyone...

Tch.

3 - Homecoming

“[Please don't say things like that, Grandfather.]”

“That’s… I’m sorry.”

He seemed to realize how impious his words were just now and apologized to me.

Hmm…

It doesn’t seem like I’m the one he should be apologizing to, so why is he apologizing to me?

No, maybe he thought it wasn't appropriate to say to me, who believes in God and receives His power.

Like I said before, if I were a normal Saintess, I would have been angry and said it was nonsense, because it was such an impious remark.

Well, I only know about the existence of God and don't really care whether I believe in Him or not.

Still, I had to show that I was a little uncomfortable so that he would understand, and thankfully, he seemed to understand his mistake when I showed it.

But something…

‘Now that I’ve actually met him, I have nothing to say…’

I used to think I wanted to meet him… but now that I've met Aselina, or rather, my grandfather, who is the Pope, I don't have much to say.

It's obvious, but it's like neither of us has anything that can be called daily life… Especially in the case of Aselina, who is working hard as the Pope,

most of the conversations will be about work, so there's nothing to talk about in daily life.

I was wondering what to do, so I thought about telling him stories about what happened at the academy.

Well… if I talk about how I'm getting along with my friends and what happened, he'll enjoy listening to me, apart from the fact that I'm using my abilities to save people.

What story should I start with…

“[Ah… well… let's start with what happened at the academy! How I met the Hero, Stella, and Uriel!]”

Thinking about it now, there were a lot of fun things that happened.

Well, it wasn't all fun, and there were a few things that were fun for me but were like nightmares for them…

‘Should I exclude those stories?’

Even if I exclude that, there are still many stories to tell.

I thought so and started telling the story.

Aselina was a little confused.

When she first heard Aria's story about her time at the academy, she thought she was having a good time, just like she said she wanted to go to the academy at first.

Of course, she knew about some of the things that had happened there, but she didn't say anything because Aria was avoiding mentioning them.

She hadn't met her for long, and she was a Guardian Dragon with a duty to protect humanity.

Even if she had affection for one human being, the Saintess, there was no reason to have much affection for her. She had been close to the previous Saintesses, and had even shared the end with some of them…

‘This is really the first time I’ve met a child like this…’

Aria was different.

She was very different from the Saintesses she had met so far.

She had never told those children about her identity.

She had been acting as the Pope by gradually changing her face and appearance and pretending to be the next Pope.

But…

‘I don’t want to deceive her…’

She wanted to reveal her identity to this child.

She wanted to face Aria as her true self, without being ashamed.

She had thought several times that it would be okay to tell her her identity now, because Aria wouldn't reveal her identity, wouldn't she?

In Argent's case… it was just a special relationship.

Back when the Hero party of salvation existed, it was a time when the survival of the world was at stake, beyond national borders, so it couldn't be helped.

But now it was different.

Even though there was no reason to reveal her identity to Aria, for some reason she wanted to tell Aria everything.

The reason was simple.

‘Is this… what they call maternal love?’

When she first met Aria, she looked so precarious.

If she hadn't watched over her… if she hadn't grabbed the child who had fallen to the floor, she was just a fragile life that would have faded away.

But the child's heart was so kind and bright.

She didn't complain about her situation and was determined to live somehow.

Was that why?

Without realizing it, she reached out her hand for the first time.

Even forgetting that her appearance was not the Pope's, but her original female form.

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, she wasn't caught because the girl had hearing and visual impairments, but it was something that would have shocked her.

She knew that she had the qualities of a Saintess, but she didn't bring her in hoping that she would become a Saintess.

She brought her in because she knew that if she left her alone, she would end up in a bad situation and die.

To raise her as a nun… yes, in a way, it could be seen as adoption.

But the girl was different.

She acted as if she had been chosen by God, as if she had a destiny. She declared that she would do asceticism, which most nuns and priests didn't even bother with, and then she went on a journey with the adventurers.

She was shocked when she heard that she had saved a person as an apprentice nun who couldn't even handle Holy Power properly, squeezing

out her life force to save him.

It was impossible for an ordinary person.

No matter how devoted they are, there are few people who would give their lives to save a stranger they don't know.

She used up all her life force and gave her life to save the man's acquired disabilities and his dying body.

She had performed a miracle.

Could it be that God couldn't stand to see that?

Aria was revived.

Becoming a Saintess.

It was as if she was born to be a Saintess.

Aselina closed her eyes, recalling the words of the adventurers who had seen the extinguished flame of life rekindle, filling the surrounding life with flowers.

Should she tell this child?

If something happens to this child, which she hopes doesn't happen, will she regret not telling her then?

‘It’s right to tell her.’

She didn't want to be seen as family in the guise of the Pope, which was just a facade, not her true self.

She wanted to become a true family and embrace this child.

‘Not now… but.’

She wasn't going to tell her right away.

Just because she decided to do it doesn't mean she can tell her right away.

She needed some time.

It might sound a little strange to say that she needed to prepare herself, but she didn't know how Aria would react when she revealed to Aria, who had been living as her grandfather for a long time, that she was actually a Guardian Dragon… a non-human being.

If she showed fear of being a dragon, not a human, she might be shocked and bedridden for a while.

Well… she had to hope that wouldn't happen.

But there was something more important than that right now.

‘Evan… the Hero of this generation…’

She knew a lot about him.

Of course, she hadn't met him in person much, and most of what she knew was from Argent, but she heard that he was growing the fastest of all the Heroes in history.

That might be thanks to the necklace that even she didn't know about, but that doesn't mean that the Hero's qualities can be underestimated.

But…

‘It seems like… there are a lot of mentions of that Hero.’

Aria mentioned the Hero named Evan so often that it was strange.

She even smiled as if she was enjoying herself every time she talked about the Hero, so she couldn't help but be shaken.

‘Could it be… that she likes that child…?’

She knew that humans could become lovers and have children.

But the thought that her granddaughter, the child she cherished and loved, was in that kind of relationship with the Hero made her angry.

'…I need to see what kind of guy he is with my own eyes.'

In fact, she knew.

She had heard it so much from Argent that there was no man more suitable for Aria than the Hero.

But she wanted to confirm something.

She felt like she had to.

"[And there's more, Evan…]"

All about the Hero named Evan.

"[I feel a little sorry, but he's a good person who always believes in me.]"

"[I don't really have any serious injuries, so he doesn't have to come, but he's always the first to visit me in the hospital…]"

Crack

She had to… she had to…

4 - Homecoming

It had been a week since Evan started living in the Holy Nation of Varkan.

'What is this…?'

Suddenly, Evan felt a threat to his life.

He didn't know the reason.

When he first arrived, he felt the hostility in the eyes of the paladins who looked at him strangely.

But lately, he felt a chill that went beyond hostility, as if they were after his life.

Naturally, he was curious about the reason, so he asked Danas, but all he got was that they were like uncles and there was nothing he could do, and that he should somehow earn their recognition.

Saying to earn recognition was usually taken to mean that they were wary of him.

In other words, Evan's head understood their reaction as being wary of an outsider.

He wondered why they would accept the Hero as an outsider, but it was an understandable reaction.

No matter how much of a Hero he was, he was just a stranger to them… No matter how long they had been together, even if the Saintess directly said it was okay, they might not believe it unless they saw it for themselves.

That wasn't all.

"You are the Hero, aren't you?"

A gentle and kind-looking grandfather.

The greatest leader of Varkan, whom all the people of Varkan looked up to and respected, the Pope. He tilted his head in confusion for a moment… but he felt a strange hostility in his eyes.

'Did I… do something wrong?'

They wouldn't be people who would do something right away.

Aria introduced them with a smile as her grandfather and her knights, so he didn't think they would do anything secretly.

But even so, he couldn't help but feel wronged.

He hadn't done anything, but everyone was giving him this look. If it was just one or two people, it would be one thing, but even the Pope was doing it, so he wondered if he had done something wrong.

'But I'm here for the first time today…'

Of course, he had been to Varkan before.

Even before he started attending the academy, he had briefly stopped by with his teacher, and Varkan was the first place he visited when he went to take the Trial of Wisdom with Aria.

When he first came to Varkan for the Trial of Wisdom, there were knights who looked at him with hostility, but not as much as now.

Now it was as if they had become mortal enemies.

'Aria… what did you say about me…?'

There was only one reason why they were looking at him with such hostility.

Whenever Aria was seriously injured, what on earth was the Hero doing? He suddenly wondered if they had animosity because of that.

'So that's why…?'

He had seen Aria get along with the paladins and even the Pope like family.

There could be enough resentment left over from the fact that he became a Hero and made her sacrifice every time without properly protecting her.

Once he thought that far, he finally understood why everyone was giving him that look.

Evan clenched his fist tightly.

Of course, he still felt wronged.

It was hard to think that everything that happened to Aria was entirely his fault.

Ever since he started attending the academy, unbelievable and huge incidents had been happening one after another, and most of them were major incidents that he couldn't handle alone.

The first time Aria had to sacrifice was when he hadn't even properly awakened to the power of the Hero, when he faced the high-ranking demon who was secretly hiding and preparing to attack the academy.

And then, two executives of the Demon King Army appeared and threatened not only the academy but also the lives of the Hero and the Saintess Aria.

Frankly speaking, if Argen Isis hadn't been around them, it would have been impossible for them to survive.

And…

'If Aria hadn't been there… I wouldn't be alive like this.'

It's all thanks to that child.

His heart ached so much for this world… this reality where that child had to sacrifice herself.

It's not that he's not at fault.

What is he doing as a Hero, not even sharing the burden of the Saintess who is covering everything and suffering?

He felt self-loathing.

He felt guilty.

He was so confused about what he had been doing, what he had been holding a sword for, and what he had been training for.

That's why…

"I'm sorry."

Evan bowed his head to the Pope, no.

To the grandfather of a girl… to her family.

The Pope, who had been showing a strange hostility until just now, looked flustered at Evan's sudden action.

'A, an apology?'

He was apologizing to him directly, even bowing his head.

As the Pope and as Aselina, the Guardian Dragon, she couldn't help but feel embarrassed.

But…

'Why is he apologizing?'

Let's hear him out first.

With that thought, she sat still and faced Evan.

Evan, who had clenched his fists tightly, carefully began to speak.

"I am still very lacking. The Hero is supposed to save everyone and lead the world to peace… but I am so pathetic that I can't even bring happiness to one person."

The happiness of one person.

Aselina's eyes widened at those words.

Only then did she understand why Evan was trying to apologize to her.

'He hates himself for not doing anything even though he likes Aria…'

Suddenly, Aselina wondered why she had such hostile feelings towards the Hero.

Yes, she thought that the idea of her family-like child falling in love with a man she didn't know and having a child was like that child was drifting away from her.

But maybe that wasn't the only reason.

'I heard that this generation's Hero has great qualities…'

Just because they are her family doesn't mean they are stupid people who can't tell right from wrong.

The life she has lived as the Pope is only a small part of her life as a dragon.

She was the Guardian Dragon, who had lived for an immeasurable amount of time on this land… a living fossil, or even history itself.

Therefore, if she put aside all her personal feelings for Aria and looked at the Hero from an objective point of view, it would be hard to find someone as unhappy as this generation's Hero.

He had the strongest and highest qualities, but unfortunately, he had to go through too many incidents in a short period of time.

He entered the academy to develop his strength, but he clashed with a high-ranking demon who was secretly hiding and preparing to attack, and in the process, he watched Aria selflessly throw herself to save him and Stella, and suffer serious injuries.

That wasn't all.

When they went to the Demon Realm for a trial run, the Doom Magic beast that had been sleeping under it happened to wake up at that moment.

Evan would have been able to do nothing with his strength, which was far from enough to face the executives of the Demon King Army.

If he hadn't awakened, that is.

During Maleficent's attack, the executives of the Demon King Army and many demons attacked together, so even if Aria had sacrificed herself, it would have been difficult if he hadn't succeeded in the second awakening.

Aria had neutralized the Life Vessel, effectively weakening Maleficent completely, so she was able to capture her easily, but if it hadn't been for Argen Isis, she wouldn't have been able to capture her like that.

She later learned that she had installed a magic circle in the basement of the academy to create a place for her to descend.

If she hadn't been there, it would have been impossible to defeat Maleficent even if she had destroyed the Life Vessel.

In other words, this generation's Hero had done his job.

But…

"Maybe I don't deserve to be a Hero."

To say such a thing?

Aselina was speechless.

"But…"

However,

That's why Aselina had no choice but to dispel her doubts about this generation's Hero.

"But I promise you. I will protect Aria… I will defeat the Demon King for Aria's sake. I will make Aria happy, no matter what."

A sincerity that came from the bottom of his heart.

The Hero was sincerely declaring that he would make Aria happy.

In front of her, who was her mother-in-law and Pope grandfather.

"That is… the atonement I can make for Aria."

Aselina met Evan's unwavering eyes.

Then, she smiled and bowed her head.

'I guess I have no choice but to acknowledge him at this point.'

How could she not acknowledge him when he said that much?

He passed.

'I'll support you.'

Hoping that the two of them would get along, Aselina decided to return to being the Pope.

She thought that would be enough.

Return Home (Interlude)

For some reason, I suddenly felt a shift in the atmosphere.

However, Evan had no regrets about what he had just said.

He spoke the truth, all of his thoughts.

Perhaps it was thanks to that declaration, filled with resolve, that the Pope, who had been giving Evan hostile looks just moments ago, now wore a softened expression.

I didn't know why, but I was relieved that the hostile gaze directed at me had subsided. Receiving such a look from the supreme leader of the Holy Kingdom, Varkan, was mentally exhausting, even for the Hero.

Who knew what might happen…

Of course, as long as Aria existed as the Saintess, I wouldn't be attacked, but the subtly hostile gazes I felt whenever I went outside made me think I wasn't exactly welcome in Varkan.

'The citizens weren't like that though…'

The people walking around and the nuns didn't show any hostility in their eyes when they looked at me.

It was strange that I only felt that way from the Pope and the Holy Knights.

Those who could be called the greatest power in Varkan.

But…

'That's a relief.'

They say sincerity gets through, right?

Perhaps by telling the Pope how much I cared for Aria, I was pardoned on the condition of defeating the Demon King, despite my wrongdoings.

I couldn't know what he truly felt, but I decided to be grateful that the hostility in his gaze had disappeared.

As I thought that, closing my eyes and bowing my head, the Pope, who had been silent, carefully called out to Evan.

"Hero."

"... Yes?"

What was it?

I raised my head and met the Pope's gaze, which was now filled with worry, unlike the hostility from before.

Was he worried about Aria?

"I've told the Saintess this before… but sometimes I wonder. Was it right to bring that child here and raise her as a nun?"

"..."

"The Saintess says she's fine, but the thought of that pure girl having to sacrifice herself… I wish I could step in instead, but…"

The Pope shook his head.

Unfortunately, the Pope is chosen as the one most suited for the position among all humans. In other words, the most respected among the priests rises to the position of supreme leader.

Of course, faith is important, but talent for Holy Power and the ability to wield it aren't always proportional to faith, so not every Pope possesses overwhelming Holy Power.

The current Pope does have strong Holy Power, but it's nothing compared to the Saintess, who was directly chosen by God and granted divine authority.

From the start, the Saintess's power itself was an extraordinary and powerful force that could change the world, so it was only natural that the Pope, who was still just a regular human, couldn't perform the same miracles as the Saintess.

It was impossible to step in for the Saintess.

"I also… wish Aria didn't have to participate in defeating the Demon King, but I suppose that's impossible…"

No matter how pitiful Aria was, if the world were to be destroyed, everything would be over, pity or not.

Right now, the only way was for the Hero and the Saintess to step up and defeat the Demon King.

It was unfortunate, but I had no choice but to ask Aria to defeat the Demon King with me.

It was fortunate that she didn't refuse…

If anything, she was too eager, which was the problem.

The Pope sighed and continued.

"As you know, Hero, Aria doesn't know much."

Of course, that would be the case.

She hadn't been in the world for long, and unlike us, who could see with our eyes and hear with our ears, Aria couldn't.

There must be more than one or two inconveniences.

"I entrust Aria to you."

The Pope bowed his head to Evan.

"..."

Evan thought of Aria.

He thought of the pure girl who smiled brightly, simply from rolling around in the snow.

And he thought of the girl who, even while playing those games, remembered the memories of the Demon Realm, where snowstorms raged.

Someday… to prevent her from recalling those painful memories ever again.

"Yes, I will make her happy, no matter what."

"... That's all I need to know."

Even if he couldn't be with Aria, if that was the happiness she desired, Evan would secretly erase the affection he held for her.

He wanted Aria to be happy, not just to love her.

Yes, he would make her happy.

He would, without fail.

The time spent in the Holy Kingdom was enjoyable in its own way.

Every time I met the Holy Knights, the only stories I could tell were about what happened at the academy, so I would bring up fun memories of what happened, which led to the minor incident of them glaring at Evan with even more fiery eyes, but I took care of that myself.

Evan wasn't that kind of person, so I told them not to glare at him like that.

Of course, if they asked how I knew about the glares when I couldn't even see, unfortunately, when they sent gazes filled with so many emotions, I could tell what they were thinking just from the Thought-form flowing out.

After all, Thought-form changes depending on how well a person hides themselves.

It's not all-powerful.

Even Aselina's Divine Eye showed me as a pure girl to Aselina, just because my deep desire to purely obtain pleasure was pure.

Most abilities have their weaknesses.

Even the Thought-form I'm currently using as a means of communication can receive false information from people who are good at connecting with it.

After all, Thought-form is just saying what you're outwardly thinking, so if you're thinking of a lie as if it's the truth, I have no choice but to accept it.

Well, it's hard to say that's a weakness. Don't people often lie when they're talking normally?

It's similar to that.

And it's just how I communicate…

"[How was the Holy Kingdom? I thought it might be a little boring for you all.]"

"It was fine. All the things that have happened so far have been so shocking, like the Demon Realm, that it felt healing…"

Stella said it didn't matter, and that she was glad she could rest, but Evan was a little different.

"Sorry… I feel a little sick…"

Evan sighed deeply, saying he felt sick.

'Seriously…'

Thanks to me telling them to stop looking at him like that, he wasn't getting hostile looks anymore, but since he had received those looks at first, he didn't seem to have a very good impression.

I think this happened last time too, but it's happened again.

It's unfortunate.

"I apologize. I will educate our people separately later."

"[Please do, Danas… I hope you scold them severely.]"

"Yes, I understand. And to the Hero… I truly want to apologize."

"I-It's okay…"

Danas offered Evan an apology, looking genuinely sorry.

"But I hope you can understand. Most of our people are worried about the Saintess. The reason they glared at the Hero like that was probably because of their concern for the Saintess."

"[Please tell them that… they don't need to worry that much in the future.]"

"I will keep that in mind…"

Danas bowed his head in response.

Well, since I wasn't the one who was directly affected, it's not something I need to worry about that much.

But the fact that they sent such a gaze to the Hero who was going to save the world seemed offensive, so I reacted sensitively without realizing it.

It's not something I need to worry about that much.

'No… is it not something I need to worry about that much…?'

After all, it's my hometown and a country I should be proud of, but when I took a guest there, they greeted the guest in such an absurd way.

This is something I should be ashamed of.

"[I'm sorry, Evan. Danas said he would educate them well, so can you please forgive them?]"

"I said before, I'm not that worried about it. And it's not like I don't understand why they're sending those looks…"

Why is he so understanding?

Is that why he's the Hero?

I feel sorry for no reason.

"Ah… we're here."

Did we arrive already?

"This is the Imperial Capital…"

"I said I didn't want to come, but you dragged me here by force…"

I chuckled at Stella's grumbling voice.

We had now arrived in the capital of the Empire.

Invited by Uriel.

1 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

"I've been waiting!"

It was none other than Uriel who greeted us first.

When I told her that I would stay in the Holy Kingdom for a while before going to her as soon as I was invited, she was so happy that I could feel her excitement in the letter.

I don't think she was like this before the Trial, but I could feel that her personality had become much more active since she received the Trial.

Well, I prefer her with this kind of personality.

Before, she tried to maintain a dignified appearance because of her position, but frankly, that kind of appearance didn't suit Uriel at all.

I think the image of a tomboyish princess suits Uriel the best.

Everyone else seemed to think so too, except for me.

"[Ahaha... Heh!]"

"I've been waiting, Aria~!!"

As soon as I came out, Uriel hugged me and jumped up and down.

I don't think she used to be like this, but I guess she was so sad that everyone went to the Holy Kingdom except for her at that time, that as soon as she saw me, she hugged me without caring about the eyes around her.

"P, Princess!"

"Maintain your dignity!"

The knights around us were shocked and said that because she suddenly hugged me in a place where other knights were watching, but the fact that the Saintess of Barkan in the Holy Kingdom and the princess of the Empire were hugging each other like close friends was not a big problem.

More than anything, it looked good, so they were just telling her to keep her dignity, but everyone was smiling happily.

Anyway, Uriel, who finally remembered her position at the knight's words to keep her dignity, stepped away from me again and asked if I had a hard time coming all the way here, looking around here and there.

Well, there's no way I'd have a hard time with just this.

I answered that I was okay and laughed softly.

I wasn't really having a hard time either.

"Let's go in quickly! Father is waiting!"

Ah.

Hmm...

At first, I thought I should listen to Uriel, my friend, as much as possible since she invited me, but as soon as I arrived, I wanted to go back home right away when I thought about meeting the Emperor.

Stella, in particular, seemed to know what I was thinking, and carefully asked Uriel if we could go back.

Of course, it was virtually impossible to go back at this point, so Stella had to meet the Emperor half-crying.

'Well... it wouldn't be a problem to meet him...'

How many imperial citizens have I saved?

Of course, I saved them more out of pleasure than out of a pure desire to save people who were dying in front of me.

Most of the time, I lived in the Demon Realm, so even if I saved a lot of people in the Demon Realm, ordinary imperial citizens would only know about me through people who are interested in me or through the statues that are made.

'Wow...'

Even so, considering that all these people came out to welcome me and Evan, it seems like I haven't lived my life in vain.

Evan was also expressing his doubts as he looked around at the people who were sending him friendly gazes.

'Isn't he going to like it more here because no one is glaring at him here, unlike in the Holy Kingdom?'

Anyway, those idiot uncles are going to ruin the country's image.

I don't know if they didn't like the fact that their idol was just acquainted with a man, but they kept glaring at Evan from beginning to end.

I told Danas, so I believe they won't do that next time, but I wonder if I'll ever go to the Holy Kingdom with him again.

"The Holy Kingdom and here are completely different..."

He's already wrong just by saying that.

It seems like he doesn't want to go to the Holy Kingdom anymore.

After I defeat the Demon King later, I don't plan to settle down in the Holy Kingdom either, so maybe we're even.

The Holy Kingdom, of all places, is really not a good place to settle down because there's not much to do. It's not really wrong to live in the Empire, considering my original hometown, and it's actually closer to the answer.

I was thinking that and walking inside for a moment,

'... Huh?'

What was I just thinking?

I don't plan to settle down in the Holy Kingdom, so maybe we're even?

It's really not a good place to settle down because there's not much to do?

Live in the Empire?

'Uh...'

No matter how I look at it, aren't those things that someone who is going back to their original world wouldn't think about...?

I said I was going back to my original world, but what I'm thinking about is where to settle down after defeating the Demon King, so I wondered again.

I wonder if I really plan to go back.

"We're here!"

In the meantime, Uriel, who seemed to have arrived, smiled brightly and opened the door to guide us inside.

"Uriel!"

"Papa!"

"It's been a while! Hehe!"

Looking at that, it seemed like there was no need to worry.

After all, even in the game, the Emperor didn't show such a dignified appearance in private, so I didn't have to worry about anything troublesome happening.

"Come here. I prepared it for you."

The Empress smiled at us and said.

Evan looked back at me and carefully walked inside.

I don't know why he looked back at me before going in, but I decided to think that he was doing that because this was his first time in this kind of situation.

'Wouldn't anyone be confused if they saw that?'

A daughter-obsessed Emperor.

To be honest, I'm a little confused too.

The Emperor narrowed his eyes and looked at the two people in front of him.

'The Hero and the Saintess...'

The Emperor felt a little complicated as he looked at the young girl with blonde hair and closed eyes and the black-haired man standing in front of him.

No matter how much he is the Emperor of this country, he didn't like the fact that these young children had to bear the duty of saving the world...

He didn't like the fact that they were carrying such a heavy burden.

It was definitely the duty of adults, not children, to step up and solve the problem, but unfortunately, it was almost impossible to fight against those who were trying to destroy the world unless they received the duty of Hero and Saintess.

'It's unfortunate...'

It's really unfortunate.

It's unfortunate that these young children have such a heavy burden of world peace on their shoulders... and that they have a sense of duty to do it.

It was unfortunate, but as someone who had to take responsibility for countless imperial citizens, he had no choice but to turn a blind eye to this sacrifice.

He had no choice but to pray that they would do it.

The Demon King was such an existence.

"..."

Apart from that, he always felt sorry for the Saintess.

Although it was for the sake of creating a new center for the imperial citizens, he didn't like the fact that he was using that young child for propaganda.

On top of that, he felt even more that he was undermining the spirit of the child who had sacrificed herself for the sake of the people.

But he had no other choice. There is no commoner in this world who is not enthusiastic about the story of the Saintess who saves even ordinary imperial citizens.

In fact, there were as many imperial citizens who respected the Saintess as there were people in Barkan in the Holy Kingdom.

It was true that the relationship between the two countries had narrowed to an incomparable degree compared to the past thanks to the Saintess.

"I am always grateful, Saintess."

Originally, they were from different countries, and he was the Emperor who ruled this country, so it was fair to say that he was in a similar position to the Saintess.

In other words, originally, there was no need to treat her with such courtesy that distinguished between superiors and inferiors, but...

'I respect her as a person.'

How could he not be polite to a girl who is younger than him, who has disabilities in her eyes and ears, and who is sacrificing herself for the world?

There is a reason why the people of Barkan are so protective of her.

So...

"I hope you can rest as much as you want and go back."

"[T, Thank you...?]"

The Emperor smiled at the Saintess, hoping that this Empire that he had built would be a little bit of a haven for her.

Aria tilted her head at the sight, but soon bowed her head, thanking him.

Everyone smiled and watched the heartwarming scene, and soon everyday stories began to be exchanged and a flower of conversation began to bloom.

From the story of how his daughter's personality had changed a lot since she went to the academy, to the story of what happened there.

The story of the Demon King Army executives and the story of defeating them.

There were many stories to tell.

Of course, in order to maintain this pleasant atmosphere, most of the stories that were usually enjoyable were brought up.

The story continued until the sun went down.

2 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

Ugh… that was a bit tiring.

Dining at the same table as the emperor who governs the country turned out to be more burdensome than I thought.

I don't usually care about such things, but I guess it's because things from the game keep popping into my head.

After all, the emperor did appear a few times in the game…

Is it fortunate that he's an emperor with a conscience, unlike most emperors?

Well, if he weren't, a youngest daughter like Uriel wouldn't exist, so…

Still, there was quite a difference between knowing the setting and actually meeting him.

Even just Evan, Stella, and Uriel, whom I met after coming to this world, were quite different from what I knew as settings and game characters.

Of course, it's more about learning things I didn't know in the game than personality differences.

The difference is felt in those minor things.

One thing I've realized while living in this world is that settings and information from the game should only be remembered for reference.

The information I knew from the game isn't omnipotent.

'That was tough…'

The conclusion is that it was tough eating next to the emperor.

Then, as if I wasn't the only one feeling it, Evan and Stella were clearly showing signs of discomfort.

Of course, Uriel wasn't perceptive enough to notice such subtle atmospheres, so she just smiled brightly and asked if it wasn't delicious.

Seeing that no one answered, I sighed inwardly and answered for them.

"[It was like a feast I've never had in the Holy Kingdom. It was really delicious.]"

It was actually really delicious.

I dare say it was no exaggeration to say that they were the most delicious foods I had ever eaten.

I feel a bit bad for putting down my own country, but it's hard to say that the food in the Holy Kingdom is delicious, even as a polite remark.

I guess it's because most of the people in the country believe in God, so… how should I put it… unlike the Empire, they have a simple eating habit.

Because of that, the food isn't generally that delicious.

'Honestly, I was a little touched…'

Compared to the high-end food I ate in the modern era, the quality is a bit lower, but it was definitely delicious compared to what commoners eat.

It feels like it's been a long time since I've eaten something like this…

Anyway, since it was true that it was delicious, I smiled brightly and said so, and Uriel, looking genuinely pleased, put her hand on her hip and said confidently that I could tell her anything I wanted to eat.

That might be a bit difficult…

I don't know much about food, so it's hard to specifically ask for something I want to eat.

Above all, we're invited guests, so it's weird to ask for what we want to eat…

"It's a bit late today, so shouldn't we rest soon?"

"Ah… finally…!"

Stella's face lit up, as if she was so happy to finally be able to rest.

Unlike Evan and me, Stella didn't really like going out and doing things.

In vulgar terms, she's a hikikomori, a shut-in.

Well, most magicians are like that.

The development of magic is quite advanced, so it was the perfect time to do more magic research.

But…

"Why don't we all go take a bath together?!"

"Eh…"

"What…"

Oh.

It's the bombshell declaration I half-expected.

Evan and Stella looked flustered at Uriel's innocent suggestion.

Stella then turned to Evan, who had made a strange noise at Uriel's suggestion.

'Evan…'

What kind of imagination did Stella's words spark?

Surely he didn't imagine us all going into the bathroom together like that.

'He's old enough to think that way…'

Besides, he hasn't relieved his desires while living as the Hero, so he's even more likely to.

But…

'Something… feels strangely dirty…?'

Is it because he's imagining me like that, or is there another reason?

I don't know why, but I'm a little annoyed.

'Why am I like this these days…'

Of course, it's not in my nature to get annoyed to their faces, so I moved towards the bathroom so they wouldn't notice I was annoyed.

Regardless of what Evan was imagining, I definitely wanted to take a bath soon.

"Ah, Aria?"

"[I'll go to the bathroom first.]"

I said that and left the room.

Fortunately, no one stopped me.

The moment I completely left the room, as soon as the door closed, I suddenly had a thought.

'I don't think I heard which direction the bathroom was in…'

Come to think of it, the castle was very large.

It wouldn't be easy to find the bathroom we were going to use here.

If I had at least heard which direction it was in, it wouldn't be impossible to find it while looking around, but I didn't hear which direction it was in.

I can't use Holy Power detection on the entire castle.

'I messed up…'

I hesitated for a moment, wondering if I should wander around alone, but I soon gave up and went back to the room.

After all, it would be foolish to wander around this vast space without any information.

"Aria?"

"What's wrong?"

Stella and Evan asked what was wrong when I came back as soon as I left.

Unable to answer, I hung my head, and Uriel said as if she had just remembered.

"I'm sorry, Aria! Come to think of it, I don't think I told you where it was!"

"Ah."

"Come to think of it…"

This is her first time here, so there's no way she'd know the way.

Stella and Evan looked at me, as if they had realized that I had said I would go to the bathroom first without properly hearing which way it was.

"Pfft…"

"…"

Unlike Evan, who was somehow maintaining his composure, Stella was already half-suppressing her laughter.

"[I'm sorry…]"

My appearance of going out first and then coming back…

Honestly, I think it's funny too.

Of course, I didn't laugh.

It's more embarrassing than funny to me.

Damn it…

Eventually, we arrived at the bathroom and took off our clothes as if we were used to it.

Of course, Evan, the only man, separated from us and went to the men's bath alone.

It's called the men's bath, but it's more like he rented another bathroom all to himself.

Of course, it's definitely enviable that he rented that large space all to himself, but if I thought about being alone in that large space, I'd rather have this.

No matter what, wouldn't it be better to wash with several people than to wash alone?

"But what was Evan thinking?"

"What do you mean?"

"Earlier, when you said we should all go in together, Evan made a strange face."

"Oh, really?"

Come to think of it, what was he thinking?

Well, usually Uriel and Stella, and…

'Would he… include me too…'

He probably thought of my naked body.

But…

"Doesn't Evan have someone he likes?"

"Well, then he probably only thought of that person's naked body."

"I guess so…?"

Ears perked up.

Listening to the two people's conversation, I fell into thought again.

They don't know what they're talking about.

No matter how much a man likes a woman, isn't it natural to imagine everyone's naked bodies in a situation like that just now?

I would have done the same, even if I'm a woman now.

In the first place…

'What is there to imagine about my body…'

With this meager body, even if there's some fantasy, no matter how much he likes someone, would he only think of me in a situation like that just now?

I dare to guess that even if Evan is a pure guy, he probably wouldn't.

I heard that pure guys are even more like that.

'Something's annoying me.'

It's starting to get to me.

Why is my body so meager?

I used Holy Power perception to look down at my body.

Of course, my body was still a meager girl's body.

'Wish…'

Continuing my imagination for a moment, I shook my head wildly, saying it was a ridiculous thought.

I must be crazy.

How can I make a wish for something like that?

This isn't it, really.

Ugh…

I don't know anymore.

Tsk.

3 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

It's been a while since we've all come to wash together like this.

I think I said the same thing last time, but for a man, a situation like this would be nothing short of blissful, but unfortunately, I was a woman now.

Now, I could appreciate the beauty of a woman's naked body, but I didn't feel excited or sexually aroused.

In that situation, especially since I wasn't seeing it with my eyes… I guess that feeling was even stronger.

'It's obvious, but I'm really small.'

I could really feel that I was small.

I wouldn't normally care, but now that the time to compare myself to everyone was approaching, I felt strange.

More than that, I was somehow more curious about Evan.

It wasn't that I was curious about Evan's body, but I was curious about what it would be like for him to use that large space alone.

I want to use such a large bathroom all by myself too…

Evan's body…

Hmm…

I haven't seen it directly, so I'm not sure, but I've been seeing it through Divine Power Detection, so I know what it looks like.

I can see clear muscles, enough to know that he's worked hard.

Well… it's covered by clothes, so I can't see it very well, though.

"Haa…"

At first, I was going to wash my body thoroughly before going in, but I suddenly got lazy, so I just purified my body and went straight into the bath.

Thanks to purifying my body with Holy Power, there was nothing particularly dirty on my body now.

In other words, there was no big problem with going straight into the bath.

Of course, the gazes of others around me would be unfavorable, but there were only two people here who knew about my abilities, so it wasn't a big problem.

I entered the bath and lay down with a happy expression.

If I had to pick a good thing about not being able to see, it would be that I don't fall over.

When I could see and walk around, it was easy to fall if I couldn't see well, but now I just walk around constantly looking around with Divine Power Detection, so I don't fall at all.

You might say, isn't it good to fall… but aside from the fact that it's not that painful, what could be more ridiculous than the Saintess falling in the bath?

I can't let that kind of image take root!

"I'm going in too~!"

"What…"

No, what is this.

"Wow… Aria's skin is so smooth…"

"[W, wait a minute…?!]"

No, what are you doing?!

I was startled and tried to protest, but Stella followed in even faster and scolded Uriel.

Unlike me, who had purified my body before entering, she had entered the bath without properly washing her body, which was impolite.

Who would see this woman as a princess…

Stella was also dumbfounded, saying not to say such nonsense in a somewhat hollow voice and forcibly dragged Uriel out.

In fact, it would be a problem that could be solved by simply giving Uriel purification, but I want to be alone right now.

I watched Uriel being dragged away with an awkward smile and sighed.

I really can't catch a break when I'm with these two…

Hmm…

'Come to think of it…'

I heard that there's a men's bath right next door.

To be precise, it just feels like they arbitrarily divided the men's and women's baths, but anyway, isn't that also a bathroom used by the imperial family?

One side is used by the butler, and the other is used by the maid?

'Anyway, it's right next door.'

I remember that the doors were not that far apart when I entered, but why does such a large bathroom appear when I come inside?

What kind of structure is this place that makes that possible?

Well, since I don't know anything about the castle, I can't help but wonder what kind of place this is.

I wondered what the structure of this place was like, so I first looked around.

When I look around, it doesn't seem like there are any connecting paths.

That's a natural thing.

Just the fact that it's divided into two sides like this is practically to separate men and women, so is there some kind of space distortion magic?

I thought I might be able to figure it out if I looked at the structure, so I carefully put my hand on the wall and used Divine Power Detection. This makes it easy to check the overall structure of the building.

I think I've used it like this before.

Anyway… if I do this, the Holy Power will spread along the wall and tell me what the overall structure of the building is like.

After sitting still with my hand on the wall for a while, the appearance of the building gradually began to emerge in my head.

'Hmm…'

I can feel it.

Ah, this is it.

'Ah, it looks like this…'

So this is the structure, I thought, and tried to expand the Divine Power Detection a little more.

'Huh…?'

I felt the shape of a person.

And…

'…!!!!!'

As soon as I felt something that was a little different from what I had seen so far… something that was different from ordinary people, something reminiscent of a long object, I reflexively took my hand off.

'What, what…'

I just used Divine Power Detection because I was curious about the structure of the building and wanted to find out.

That was my mistake.

'…'

I ended up seeing something I shouldn't have seen.

I was stunned with my hand on the wall, and Stella, who had come up to me and was watching me, tapped my body.

"What are you doing, Aria?"

"[Y, yes!?]"

"Huh?"

Stella tilted her head at my surprised words.

No…

I didn't see it wrong, did I…?

'I, I didn't mean to…'

It's easier to think of Divine Power Detection as detecting along the outwardly exposed curves.

So, you can think of it as spreading around me and flowing along the object.

To explain it a little more, it's closer to scanning by groping around like a wave.

That's why I can read things that are written directly on the outside.

In the case of books, it's impossible to distinguish them with Divine Power Detection because they are so thin, so I read them by reading the Thought-form.

If there was a book with letters that protruded on the outside, there would be no difficulty in reading it for that reason.

If I had shot Holy Power and read it by penetrating it, I wouldn't have been able to look at my friends with the same feeling as now.

It would just look like a non-rendered 3D model with clothes on.

But I was overlooking one thing.

The structure I was looking at now was the bathroom.

And Evan was next door.

Even if I was just spreading Holy Power to check it out because I wanted to know the structure of the building, eventually, if it spread out, Evan's body would also be subject to scanning.

In other words, Evan's raw, unclothed appearance would be naturally visible, even in a 3D model.

'What the hell…'

I immediately stopped detecting with Holy Power and took my hand off, but what I had just seen kept flashing back in my head.

"Aria?"

Stella didn't notice anything and was asking me if something was wrong, but I tried to calm my complicated feelings and gasped for breath.

Really…

For a moment, I thought I was a pervert.

I was fine even when I saw Stella or Uriel, but just…

Just…

'It's not just…'

It wasn't just.

Of course, it wasn't unrealistically absurd, but I think it's safe to say that it's up to the level of wondering if this is right.

To put it bluntly, would it be the average of doujinshi?

I only felt it as a shadow, in the form of a 3D model with no color, but the shock was indescribable.

Forget it.

I have to forget it.

I have to forget it…

'I guess… he's not a Hero for nothing…'

I suddenly thought that.

It was an unforgettable sight…

Honestly, I was sure that anyone who saw it once would never forget it.

But the fact that it was Evan, not anyone else… and the fact that I saw it, made it even more absurd.

I wondered why I did that.

I also wondered if something like that could exist.

I have all sorts of complicated thoughts.

'Am I going to die…?'

I don't know why I'm worrying about this, but I could imagine that anyone who saw what I saw earlier would think the same way as me.

I didn't expect it, but it was a mode-applied version on page 19.

Well, the original work wasn't a 19-rated game, so if you set the settings in that direction, it's reasonable to bring in a mod.

I didn't think much of it when I saw it in the illustration, but when I saw the actual size, I was speechless.

…

I suddenly wanted to die.

4 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

“Are you really okay? Is something wrong?”

You can say that again.

Something seems to be wrong.

Honestly, if they had seen what I just saw, I think they would react like me.

The aftereffects of seeing that huge Holy Sword were longer than I thought, lasting until I finished my bath and came out.

“Aria?”

As soon as I came out, Evan kept avoiding my gaze, tilting his head and asking me. But the more he did that, the more I wanted to avoid him.

Every time I see Evan, that memory comes back to me.

That huge, shadowy Holy Sword that I couldn't see anything of… Of course, I'm not talking about the Holy Sword he usually carries around, but the Holy Sword that every man carries around.

“[N-Nothing… It’s nothing…]”

I couldn't meet Evan's eyes as he approached with a worried expression, and I turned my head away as I answered.

He looked at me with a questioning expression, but he seemed to think better of it and went back to his room, telling me to tell him if anything happened.

‘Did he… notice I used Divine Power Detection?’

I wonder if he knows that I accidentally saw his… thing.

Personally, I hope he doesn't.

However, judging from his reaction to my question, he probably didn't notice. But I can't rule out the possibility that he's pretending not to know because he thinks I'll be embarrassed.

Anyway, it's not certain, but even so, he's as sensitive as Aselina and I are when it comes to Holy Power…

Even if he's putting on that clueless face, I can't help but be suspicious.

Maybe he already noticed that I saw his body with Divine Power Detection, but he's pretending not to know because he's worried I'll be embarrassed, and he's embarrassed too?

Or maybe he didn't notice that I saw his… thing.

If it's the latter, wouldn't I be the only one embarrassed if I mentioned it here?

Anyway, I can't be sure if he noticed or not, but the other person is none other than the Hero, so it would be strange if he didn't notice that I used Divine Power Detection.

'Hmm…'

Why did I do that?

I'm starting to regret it.

That regret lingered even after I parted ways with Evan and returned to the room with everyone.

"I've always dreamed of sleeping with my friends like this!"

"Sigh…"

At Uriel's words, Stella sighed and lay down next to her as if she couldn't help it.

“I wanted to be comfortable when I sleep, but…”

“Ah… Am I bothering you…? I can give you a separate room if you want…”

“It's okay, we can share a room. It's not like I'm a VIP…”

“S-Stella…!”

Uriel's eyes welled up with tears as if she was touched by Stella's words.

As someone with a Doctorate in Stella Studies, I can tell that Stella is deliberately grumbling and acting like she can't help it because she's embarrassed.

Speaking of a Doctorate in Stella Studies, it feels a little strange.

“[That's right. Now that we're here, why don't we talk about things we haven't been able to talk about until now?]”

This is good for getting closer.

Just as I was about to start talking, Evan suddenly came to mind.

‘Isn't it a bit much to be talking like this with just the three of us…?’

Does that mean Evan isn't a friend?

As soon as I thought that, I felt like I should call Evan.

“[Um… Should we call Evan too?]”

“Huh?”

“Ah! Now that you mention it, Evan was here too!”

Uriel giggled and left to call Evan.

After Uriel disappeared, Stella turned to me.

Judging from her expression, she had a satisfied smile as if she didn't expect me to call Evan here. I don't know why she's smiling so contentedly, but it feels a little different from usual, like a creepy expression.

“[Why, why are you looking at me like that…?]”

“No… I just felt like you were more proactive than I thought.”

“[What do you mean…]”

Even as I said that, I was dumbfounded that I understood what Stella was thinking when she said that.

I didn't want to know…

While I was talking to Stella, Uriel brought Evan back.

Evan seemed embarrassed to be dragged to a place like this so suddenly, and he kept trying to get away, asking if it was really okay for him to be here.

Escape?

Are you trying to escape?

Absolutely not.

“[It's okay, Evan. When we say talk, we're just going to have a conversation that friends can have.]”

Evan looked dazed at my words.

In reality, it's not like we're going to have a secret conversation between girls, so it's not a big problem for Evan to join in.

Rather, we're trying to have a conversation to get closer to each other, so wouldn't it be more of a problem if Evan wasn't there?

“W-Well, then…”

Evan sat down, looking at us with a dazed expression.

‘Cute.’

Is this guy feeling burdened by the fact that he's sitting in a room with only girls at this hour to have a conversation?

‘… What?’

What was I just thinking?

While I was smiling and looking at him, I suddenly wondered why I was thinking that Evan was cute.

I was thinking that about Evan, of all people?

‘Ugh…’

What am I thinking…

I feel like I've been having strange thoughts lately.

I shook my head so that no one could see.

“But what are you guys calling me here for?”

Evan asked, as if he was curious.

To be honest, there's no real reason why I called him…

I just thought that if we're going to have a conversation to get closer as friends, it wouldn't be right not to call Evan.

“[Not really… There was no real meaning. We were talking about having a conversation to get closer as close friends, and I thought it would be strange if Evan wasn't there…]”

“That's right. So Aria said we should call you.”

“!!”

Oh, no.

I turned to Stella with a surprised expression, and Stella smiled gleefully and chuckled.

If you say it like that, it sounds like I called him for some reason.

I didn't call him for any big reason…

“Uh…”

Evan turned to me, so I turned my head away as if I had nothing to say.

“Hmph, don't get any weird ideas, Evan. You have to go back to your room after the conversation is over anyway.”

“I didn't have any weird ideas!”

“What… It's not something to brag about, but if it's me, Uriel, or Aria, we're pretty beautiful, so you didn't have any weird ideas? Don't tell me…”

“No!”

Evan shouted, telling her not to say anything ridiculous, and Stella laughed gleefully.

Uriel, on the other hand, didn't understand what she had just said and tilted her head, wondering what she was talking about.

‘Not much time left.’

Next year.

The last Relic.

The final awakening.

It would be great if Stella and Uriel could get stronger too, but unlike Evan, there's nothing I can do to help them grow.

At best, I can get them some useful weapons, but even then, it's not easy to get them secretly.

It's not like I have a lot of money, even though I look like it.

Well, it would be strange for a Saintess to have a lot of money.

Usually, clergy don't carry that much money around.

Danas is probably the same, even though he's the commander of the Holy Knight Order.

‘Relic…’

The location of the last Relic.

It'll be in the Forest of Enticement, the location of the first semester's Trial.

If I can get that, there'll be nothing to worry about in the future.

If you have three Relics, there's a set effect.

‘I wonder if that'll still apply.’

I hope so.

Well, nothing has changed much even when it's turned into reality so far, so even if the effect I know doesn't appear as it is, it'll probably appear similarly…

I don't know.

It's more important to have a good night than to think about these things right now.

“Looking for someone to go to the Imperial Capital tomorrow!”

At Stella's words, I reflexively raised my hand and answered.

“[I'll go~]”

I can't resist going out to play.

Not only me, but Evan and Uriel also answered that they would go out to play together.

Uriel, in particular, had a happy smile, saying that it was her first time going out of the castle with everyone like this.

‘Wasn't going to the sea a trip…?’

Well, it wasn't a trip, it was a Trial.

I guess that makes sense.

5 - Vacation at the Royal Palace

'How did this happen?'

I thought we were having a good time chatting at first, but as bedtime approached, the conversation gradually died down, and then I dozed off and ended up like this.

We were up late, having fun and playing games, so I must have dozed off and fallen asleep. I can't exactly wake him up and tell him to leave, can I?

That's not like me.

It's weird to care too much…

I was getting sleepy and lazy too, so I just didn't interfere, as if telling him to leave on his own.

And then…

'Eeeh…'

Evan just settled into the room and fell asleep.

The comfort of the bed was beyond imagination, making it impossible to even think about getting up and going back…!

I understand.

Honestly, it wasn't just Evan who felt like he didn't want to get up again after lying down here.

Everyone felt that way.

And everyone except me told him to just sleep here instead of telling him to go back.

Evan, already half-asleep, nodded, and ended up sleeping here.

Besides, the bed was wide enough that it wouldn't be cramped even if Evan lay down, so there was even less of a problem.

The problem is this.

Stella and Uriel took up so much space on the bed as if they were aiming for it, so there wasn't much room left.

'Umm…'

Moreover, because they were so close to each other, I naturally ended up next to Evan, and the two who were taking up so much space created a synergy, leaving me stuck next to Evan.

Why does it have to be next to me?

Evan himself probably didn't plan to fall asleep here.

He looked really sleepy earlier, so he probably didn't care where he slept.

He probably didn't want to go back because he would have to travel that long distance without knowing the way, and the two of them told him he didn't need to go.

He probably just decided to sleep here.

The problem is that there wasn't much space left, so I was forced to be next to him.

'It looks like these two were aiming for this no matter how I look at it…'

It was too deliberate to be a coincidence.

Stella and Uriel conspired to deliberately take up a lot of space on the bed and make me and Evan stick together.

'Should I tickle their feet?'

I had the urge to tickle Uriel's feet, which were reaching out to me, but the Aria I'm currently playing isn't the type to do such a thing.

I knew that best.

So, even if I wanted to do such a thing, I couldn't.

Even so, seeing Evan sleeping in a room where girls are sleeping like this made me feel strange.

I thought I would only see such a scene in a harem story.

'Well… even if I say that, it doesn't look that way to me.'

Evan, Stella, and Uriel… their forms are different, and I can definitely distinguish whether they are pretty or handsome, male or female, but that's it.

My sense of aesthetics has disappeared…

'I miss the Trial of Wisdom…'

At least at that time, I could see and hear well. In the end, it's just a matter of mindset, so coming outside wasn't a big problem, but I sometimes miss it.

Having a visual and auditory impairment is extremely inconvenient.

People who have never had them feel unfair, but they don't know how convenient it is to have them, so they don't know the sadness.

People often say, don't they?

The sense of loss and sadness is much greater when kind parents who were originally there pass away for some reason than for orphans who never knew their parents' faces.

It doesn't change just because of the presence or absence of a body.

'It doesn't matter much now, but…'

I sometimes miss it in situations like this.

Isn't it natural to want to see the protagonists of my favorite game sleeping together like this with my own eyes?

Is it just me who feels that way?

'Haa…'

Anyway.

'I should go to sleep.'

Everyone except me seems to be asleep, and it's weird for me to be the only one awake.

But…

'If I slip out of here and sleep somewhere else, I feel like I'm losing.'

Normally, I would have thought, "Don't do anything weird and just sleep," but it's a little different now.

I felt like I was losing if I just did nothing and went to sleep.

Now that it's come to this, I was going to tease Evan for sure.

'Should I just sleep next to him?'

Of course, I wasn't planning on being completely embraced just because I was sleeping next to him.

I was just going to lie next to him.

I wasn't going to be too close, but just in the middle, or a little closer to Stella and Uriel. I don't know for sure, but if Uriel thrashes around a lot, I

might get hit and wake up in the middle, but who cares about that when they're sleeping?

'He'll be very surprised when he wakes up, right?'

Now that it's come to this, I'll do as you want.

Anyway, I can only sleep here or somewhere else, and I don't want to move to another place.

More than anything…

'If I end up hugging Stella or Uriel, that's a really big deal.'

It's okay up to Stella, but if I was hugging Uriel, or even just showing myself sleeping quietly next to Uriel, I might be treated strangely.

Maybe the kind emperor from yesterday could suddenly become a crazy person who is after Evan's life. After all, he's a daughter-obsessed emperor, so wouldn't it be troublesome if rumors spread that Uriel was hugging and sleeping with a strange man?

I can't let that happen.

Sleeping next to Evan is only for that reason.

There are no other ulterior motives.

I lay down next to Evan and quietly closed my eyes.

…

It was more comfortable than I thought, so I slept well.

.

.

.

…

…

'Ah… did I fall asleep…?'

When did I fall asleep?

Evan rubbed his eyes and slowly woke up.

But…

'What is it…?'

He felt something in his arms.

Something warm, small, and fluffy.

'Uh…?'

He opened his eyes and looked down…

"Ah, Aria…?"

There, a small, cute, familiar girl with tousled blonde hair was sleeping soundly right next to him for some reason, breathing quietly.

It was Aria.

Aria in her pajamas was sleeping with regular breaths.

“…!!!”

It was too stimulating for Evan.

Evan was almost screaming at Aria's fatal surprise attack, but he barely managed to hold it in and wondered how to overcome this situation.

'I have to get out of here…!'

I can't stay here any longer.

I have to get out of here right now.

Evan thought so and was about to carefully get out of bed so that Aria wouldn't wake up, but…

"Uuum…"

As if she had been waiting for it, as soon as he tried to get out of her arms, she reached out her arms like a child looking for her mother and grabbed Evan,

"Ugh…?!"

And went straight into his arms.

She was just hugging something next to her, but unfortunately, it was driving Evan crazy to experience it directly.

If he was in a relationship with Aria, he would have hugged her as much as he wanted and rejoiced.

'I said I would defeat the Demon King and confess at that time…!'

If it was revealed that he was hugging her like this behind the scenes, he would be too embarrassed to face Aria.

I didn't want that to happen.

This feeling right now.

No, this isn't it.

No matter what, this isn't it.

But this is the only way.

Now that it's come to this…!

'I'm going to sleep again…!'

If I'm sleeping, can't I get a little absolution?

It was a very effective method, even though it was a petty thought for a Hero.

It was a decision made with a subtly calculated thought that if he clearly appealed to Aria that he was sleeping, she would have no choice but to not notice at all, so he would be scolded but not too badly.

Evan, who had been thinking that, stopped trying to get out and was about to close his eyes when,

'What is it…!!'

Unfortunately, Aria was awake as well.

Aria, who had woken up for a moment when Evan was struggling to get out in surprise, realized that she was hugging him and was continuing to pretend to sleep with her eyes closed so as not to get caught.

Of course, she had no choice but to know that she was hugging him.

Evan was trying to get out, but she was reaching out her arms and hugging Evan's body, so it would have been strange if she hadn't noticed it unless she was an idiot.

In the end, the strange confrontation between the two to avoid being caught by each other could only end when Stella, who woke up late, patted Evan and Aria, telling them to get up now.

Is it fortunate that Stella was the only one who saw the two hugging and sleeping?

Well, it wasn't helpful at all.

Vacation at the Royal Palace (Intermission)

They say it's the time when the sun, brighter than ever, illuminates the world.

To put it a bit difficultly, or rather, to put it simply… it's the New Year, though it feels a bit strange.

Saying it's the New Year here feels odd.

I didn't even see the sunrise.

'Hoo...'

Since I first came to this world, I haven't had the chance to spend the New Year leisurely like this… As soon as I arrived, I was busy growing my Holy Power and saving people here and there, and later, I spent all day rolling around in the Demon Realm.

I've hardly ever had the chance to sit back and relax on New Year's Day without anything to do.

'So much has happened.'

It was tough.

A lot happened last year.

Of course, unlike Stella, I met Uriel a bit later, but we went through the Trial of Wisdom, Magic beast subjugation, Maleficent subjugation, and so on together, so it's fair to say she's a member of the Hero party, even if she joined a bit late.

Everyone has become stronger than before.

Stella has become incomparably stronger.

On the first day of the entrance ceremony, she seemed to collapse immediately after using high-level magic without chanting, but she learned from Argent, and her skills naturally grew as she developed her own new magic.

Originally, you gain more from developing your own new magic than from learning someone else's magic… If it's Stella, who is a genius, her skills would only increase, not decrease, from developing her own magic.

And…

'It seems like it will be soon.'

Looking at Stella, it seemed like she would become a Great Mage soon.

Fast.

Incredibly…

I don't think it was this fast in the original story, but what made Stella work so hard?

When I first met her, she didn't do the magic research or studying she was supposed to do and just locked herself up to sleep, but at some point, she stopped being so laid-back and only showed herself continuing her magic research whenever she had a spare moment.

If someone who knew her saw that, they would be shocked and wonder what on earth had happened.

Even I was shocked by her completely different appearance from the beginning and wondered what was going on.

Still… Considering that we have to subjugate the Demon King, isn't it better for her to work so hard?

It would be much harder to subjugate the Demon King without Stella.

'If this story flows as it is… it might not be long now.'

It wasn't exactly intentional, but Evan's awakening was faster, and Stella's magic growth speed was incomparably faster than in the original story.

It's so fast that I'm even feeling anxious that the future I know might have changed.

Of course… Now, I'm not so worried about the future changing that I think we're doomed; it's too hopeful now.

Evan's growth is so outstanding that he can handle most enemies.

Stella is close to becoming a Great Mage, and Uriel seems relatively weak because she hasn't awakened the blood of the Imperial Family yet, but if she awakens the blood of the Imperial Family, she will become an excellent tank.

'No… maybe not a tank.'

She's a tank role in the game, but now I should call her a proper knight.

She's weaker than Evan, but she's definitely not weak.

She's incomparable to other kids her age.

'I wish just one more person would come…'

I don't know if that person will come or not.

There are many characters, but there was one person who would be most helpful in our current combination.

Though they are not human.

The problem is…

'They'll definitely come next year if they come…'

I know they're supposed to enter Class A in the first semester of the academy this year… but the problem is that it's not certain.

That person entering is practically a matter of luck, so whether they enter or not was completely gacha in the game.

It's not because I, a veteran player, don't know the conditions.

Even if you clear the achievements, whether they come or not is still a matter of probability.

'It's a relief that saving and loading changes whether they come or not.'

If not, I might have committed the crazy act of restarting the game from the beginning just to see one high score.

I'd be completely insane.

They should just come if I cleared the achievements, but the setting is that they secretly re-enter the academy after a lot of 고민, so I wonder if they make different decisions in each parallel world created by saving and loading.

Does that make sense?

The decisions should always be the same if there's no influence.

'It would be great if they just came.'

That elf would be really helpful in subjugating the Demon King.

I have no choice but to hope they enter the academy.

"Suddenly, I wonder what the second year will be like."

At Evan's words, I fell into thought.

Not only that, but Estel and Uriel also looked curious and pondered for a moment.

"[I know, I'm a little curious about what kind of classes we'll have next year.]"

"I think it will be the same for me."

Evan chuckled and said.

Well, that's how the swordsmanship department is.

Of course, you'll learn more detailed things compared to what you learned in the first year, but it'll still be swordsmanship… I don't really know if there's anything Evan, who is already walking the path of a Hero, can learn.

Maybe Uriel is the only one…

"Hmm… Honestly, I don't think I'm learning much at the academy… I've learned a lot about monsters, though."

That's true.

All the academy can teach is the basics.

Because there are different paths for each person.

That's why they focus on sparring.

Unlike magic, where the path is set, swordsmanship is based on freely controlling one's body, so the posture changes slightly depending on factors like height and build, and the way you apply force is also completely different.

Even if you're an instructor, it's impossible to teach all of that one by one.

That's why the classes focus on advice and sparring.

Even Uriel, who said that, has already far surpassed the level of a student.

Considering that Uriel's swordsmanship achievement has already surpassed the level of a student from the beginning, it could be said that her

achievement is rather slow because she hasn't learned much and hasn't awakened the 'Blood of the Imperial Family' yet.

Above all… It's not for nothing that so many students come to me for treatment.

The problem is that if they're going to get treatment from me, they should come properly injured, but there are quite a few who feign illness because they want to talk to me.

But I can't refuse to treat them, so I just make them healthy and send them back.

I can handle all the miscellaneous diseases.

It makes me sick, but it doesn't matter because it's all resolved with Holy Power.

"I want to spar with Evan if possible."

"I can do it right now?"

"Oh, really? Then shall we go spar right away?"

What are these guys… suddenly saying?

"Are you guys… thinking of sparring at this hour?"

Phew.

Thanks to Stella saying what I wanted to say, Uriel and Evan finally realized what time it was and apologized and sat back down.

"[What about Stella?]"

What kind of classes will Stella take?

Well, her level is incomparable to other students to the point where she creates her own magic, so the methods she learns at the academy are

probably useless.

Judging from the fact that she doesn't even go to class because it's not fun, that's the only way to explain it.

As expected, Stella explained that she doesn't really learn anything at the academy, and it will probably be the same in the second year.

Rather, Argent is teaching Stella.

"[I hope this year is peaceful.]"

"Isn't the Demon King supposed to be caught to be peaceful?"

Oh, I shouldn't have said that.

I hope we're not going to catch the Demon King in the second year…

…

No, right?

It shouldn't be…

Surely nothing more difficult than what I've been through so far will happen in the second year…

Surely… not…?

I said with an awkward smile.

"[It may not be something a priest should say, but… I don't really want to go back to the academy.]"

"Argen Headmaster would be sad if he heard that…"

Evan smiled at my words and chuckled as he replied.

Hmm…

I don't think he'd be sad.

The reason I don't want to go back to the academy is just because I get a headache thinking about trying to recruit that elf into the team.

Um… maybe not.

1 - New Semester

"Ugh… I'm finally back… at the academy."

I nodded at Evan's words.

I can definitely feel that I'm back.

Seeing the other students returning to the academy one by one confirms it.

The vacation, which seemed like it would be quite long, had passed by in the blink of an eye.

They say time flies when you're having fun, and since I've only been playing around here, it feels like time is passing by strangely fast.

It's as if I've become a clergyman at heart, and I feel a strange sense of guilt.

Even if I don't know anything else, the fact that I feel guilty just for sitting around and playing means I've been living a pretty busy life.

'And I'm going to be busy again soon...'

The vacation ended so quickly…

How long has it been since I had a vacation? Before I could even properly savor the sweet taste, the vacation was over, and I had to return to the academy.

The time spent is the same, but the quality is different.

Of course, if you were to ask me if I hated those days when I sacrificed my body all day to save people, I would say no.

Rather, it was enjoyable…

Considering that it was something I had to do, I would give myself full marks for enjoying the work I had to do.

"Come to think of it, the freshmen will be having their entrance ceremony soon."

Stella's words bring back memories of that time.

The first time I had an entrance ceremony… Actually, I never participated in the entrance ceremony.

I deliberately used magic to interfere in a fight and asked a professor to give me a punishment of confinement, and then I went to catch demons.

I don't know what I was thinking when I went to catch them alone back then.

'Now that I think about it, it seems like a crazy thing to do...'

Is it because I've faced high-level demons several times?

Back then, Evan was so weak that he struggled to cut off the arm of a high-level demon, but now he has grown so much that he can defeat such a demon in an instant.

I'm almost sad that I can't see it with my own eyes each time.

Even though I can't see it with Divine Power Detection.

'Because I was always passed out.'

Most of the time, I was just reveling in pleasure and going "Ehehe…"

Hmm, now that I think about it, I really did a lot of crazy things.

I'm glad everything worked out, but there were so many things that could have gone wrong.

Thinking that I went through such a difficult year and became a sophomore…

"[I feel… deeply moved.]"

Really.

"Didn't you say that before?"

Oops.

"[D, did I?]"

I answered Stella with a flustered expression.

But isn't it okay to say something like this?

After all, if I'm not happy to see my favorite characters growing up, wouldn't that be even stranger?

Well… even if I'm seeing them grow up, I'm not seeing them with my own eyes, but only seeing their outlines roughly with Divine Power Detection.

Since I've long given up on seeing the world with my eyes until I catch the Demon King, I'm satisfied with just that for now.

Well… what can I do?

I'd have to make a wish to solve a congenital disability.

The Goddess might be dumbfounded, wondering if I'm going to use a wish for something like that.

But I don't intend to use a wish for that.

As I was thinking about wishes, Stella, who was next to me, grabbed my sleeve and shook it, calling me.

"Hey, Aria. Um…"

"[Yes? Is something the matter?]"

"W, we'll… be using the same room, right?"

"[Ah… the same room?]"

I think so?

If you want, they'll let you stay in the dormitory with your first roommate, so there shouldn't be any problems. When I told her not to worry, she nodded with a relieved expression, as if she was finally relieved.

Well, considering Stella's personality, it's understandable.

Unlike me, who is already used to being together, if you think about having to spend a year with someone you don't know at all…

But Stella was definitely holed up in the dormitory with a "whatever happens, happens" attitude at first, but somehow her personality seems to have changed like this.

I wonder if other people were the same.

Hmm, I guess so.

Come to think of it, I've been living in the imperial palace like a VIP during this winter vacation, so I'm starting to crave simple home-style food.

The academy food is not as good as the food I ate in the empire, and it's all very fancy and greasy, so I'm starting to want to eat something simple.

Above all…

'I want to eat...'

When I was in the empire, even simple meals felt like Western food in my old world, so it wasn't easy to just eat deliciously.

It's just that I've gotten used to those kinds of foods since I transformed into this body and got used to this world, so I eat them well, but if you ask me if I like them, I can confidently say no.

"[Now that we're here, shall I cook something for you for the first time in a while?]"

"...!!"

Stella's eyes widened at my words.

And then she nodded.

What is it?

I just mentioned it casually because I wanted to eat some Eastern food, but the reaction was more intense than I expected.

Is there any reason to react like that…?

"[Um… I don't think I'm very good at cooking…]"

Divine Power Detection makes measuring not that difficult, but since I can't see, can't hear, and can't distinguish colors, it's very difficult to cook.

I've only been cooking with the senses I have left, so to put it bluntly, it's hard to say that I'm good at cooking.

But…

"But… I want to eat it."

Stella said that she didn't care about the reason, she just wanted to eat it.

Along with the fact that it became her favorite food because it was the food she ate when we first met.

'That… um…'

If you say that much, it's hard to refuse…

It's not just that it's hard to refuse, but I don't want to refuse.

It's not like there's a big problem if I make it… My friend wants to eat it, so I can make it for her.

"[I'll make it for you when we get back to the dormitory.]"

"Oh! Thank you, Aria!"

You should be thankful…

Even though I look like this, I'm doing you a favor by cooking for you with my disability~

Of course, I'm just thinking that jokingly, I don't really mean it.

If I told Stella this, I could see that she would have a hard time for a while, so I didn't mention it.

I just thought about it myself.

But…

"That's not fair, Stella! You're the only one eating Aria's cooking!"

"Huh? No, wait, that's…"

"Hey, Aria! Can I come along and eat too?"

I was speechless at the sight of her asking with a bright smile.

Usually, the first thing to think about is whether you can cook, but seeing her say it so casually made me wonder if I was thinking too much about it.

'Well… that's Uriel.'

She's always been like this, so there's no need to be surprised now.

Above all, if I wasn't going to make food for that reason, I wouldn't have even offered to cook for Stella in the first place.

"Um… that…"

Unlike Uriel, who had already declared that she wanted to eat, Evan had a very complicated expression, wondering whether he should say it or not.

Is it just my imagination that he would be worried all day if I didn't tell him to come and eat?

It might not be just my imagination, so I should tell him.

"[Evan, you can come too.]"

"C, can I? Really?"

Why is he asking something so obvious?

I don't discriminate against friends with things like this.

I don't know why everyone is so eager to eat the food I make, but if they want to eat it, I'll step up and feed them.

It's just a matter of making a little more…

Even so, um.

It's still embarrassing.

Ah, but I should warn them in advance.

"[Come to think of it, um… as you all know, it might be difficult to measure accurately. So, I might not season it enough, so if you think it's lacking, please tell me?]"

The two of them widened their eyes at my words.

Uriel nodded at my words and smiled, saying that she would tell me if it wasn't seasoned enough, but Stella and Evan stopped talking and froze in place.

'Huh?'

What's wrong with them?

That question only lasted for a moment,

"Sorry… Aria…"

"U, um, sorry…"

"…"

Unlike Uriel, the two of them were quite perceptive.

I never thought that these two would see the Talulah angle that even I didn't notice, so I just smiled and awkwardly laughed it off, saying it was okay.

I thought it was a joke earlier, but why am I feeling sorry?

Anyway, they say that the better you know someone, the more guilty you feel.

I wish they had reacted like Uriel.

Ugh, seriously.

2 - New Semester

At Argent Academy's office.

The academy, which had been severely damaged by the Demon's attack, was quickly restored with the power of magic.

The classrooms, which had been so devastated that their original forms were unrecognizable, were rebuilt. Only the building housing the office, which was strongly protected by Argent's powerful Demonic energy accumulated over many years, managed to retain its shape.

Thanks to Argent's leadership, who already had every detail of the academy memorized, the reconstruction was a success. It was hard to believe that the academy had been attacked by Demons just a few months prior.

"You…"

And Argen Isis, the headmaster of the rebuilt Argent Academy and a member of the Hero's party, stared in astonishment at the woman before her.

Because this was someone who shouldn't be here.

"Sorry for coming so suddenly, Argent."

"...I don't expect that from you, so there's no need to apologize."

"Hmm… I have nothing to say."

A beautiful girl with long, light green hair and sharply pointed ears looked at Argent.

Argent clicked her tongue, looking at the girl who was slightly taller than her and still looked young.

"You Elves really don't age."

"Well, from a human perspective, it's natural for a long-lived race, isn't it? The prime of an Elf is very long. Of course, in a few hundred years, I'll start to age slowly."

"Unbelievable…"

"Speaking of which, Argen Isis, you haven't aged at all."

"I became a great mage, so I won't die of old age as long as I have Demonic energy, you know?"

At Argent's words, the girl who introduced herself as an Elf nodded.

"Haa… So? Why are you here?"

Argent sighed deeply at her unchanging appearance even after hundreds of years and asked why she had come here.

As if waiting for the question, the girl opened her mouth.

"I heard that this generation's Hero and Saintess have come to the academy. And…"

…that they've already defeated two Demon King Army executives.

Argent's expression hardened at the girl's words, her eyes sparkling with interest.

Then, in a trembling voice, she said to the girl.

"You… you still haven't given up your lingering attachment."

The girl tilted her head as if wondering what strange thing she was saying.

Argent gasped at her reaction, as if she had heard something she shouldn't have from someone she never expected.

"Speaking of which… you gave a lot of help in defeating the Demon King Army executives, didn't you? We're still the Hero's party."

What on earth was she talking about?

The man who had been the center of their group had disappeared long ago.

Moreover, Argent had even found and raised her successor, practically her disciple, so she couldn't understand what her former Elf companion was saying.

Argent shouted at the girl in astonishment.

"Get a grip, Mirnel! Our era is long gone…!"

"Argent… you've become dull. I came with expectations because I heard you defeated Demon King Army executives, but it's a pity."

Argent's face contorted at the Elf girl's words, which sounded genuinely regretful.

Then, with a pitiful expression, she said in a strained voice.

"Have you forgotten what he said? All we old-timers have to do is guide the younger generation so they can move forward."

"So that's why you've been the headmaster of the academy? Yes, that's just like you, Argent, always following that man because you liked him."

"…"

Argent hung her head.

"Still, thank you. Thanks to you, it will be easy to approach this generation's Hero."

Argent watched the girl leave the room after saying only that she was leaving, then trudged over to the sofa and sat down.

"Lingering attachment… I guess it's understandable."

The Hero and Saintess who had saved the world were dead.

The Saintess, who sacrificed her body to seal the Demon King for the Hero who was not strong enough to defeat him, and died.

And the story of the Hero who loved the Saintess, who was shocked and disappeared.

She searched all over the world, but she couldn't find him because he was as strong as her or even stronger and was determined to hide.

Eventually, hundreds of years passed.

Even the strongest human would have died long ago, unless they had twisted the laws with magic like her.

Argent sat on the sofa and buried her face in her knees.

"You bastard…"

Remembering those days, when they continued their adventures happily even though the world was heading for destruction.

Remembering the man she loved… Argent wept silently.

'So, I'm back after all.'

Looking around the rebuilt academy, I felt anew how amazing the power of magic was.

There was a lot of talk about whether it could be rebuilt in this time, but in the end, they did it.

'I wish it had taken a little longer.'

That would have delayed the time I had to return to the academy.

…

Or not?

'Anyway…'

The thought of having to spend another year like this makes me feel complicated.

In my head, I think I've rested enough, but doesn't everyone feel that way after resting for a long time?

That they don't want to go back to work because they've rested for so long, but it's a pointless thought because they have to go back anyway.

That's exactly how I feel right now.

'Ah…'

I don't think it's bad.

The reason I think this way is that the Theology Department, where the classes are really boring, is bad.

Can't they make things like the Bible interesting to read?

Religious people are so sensitive that they'll get angry even if you change it a little, so I can't say it's for the sake of interest, but I personally think so.

The only thing that's bearable is confession…

Frankly, if I was healing kids in the Swordmanship Department, where there's no time to be bored, would I hate going back?

It's a bit of a greedy thought, but people want to live doing what they want to do.

I'm the same way.

Even though I've lived as a Saintess for a long time, I've only been living as a Saintess out of necessity, and I haven't completely become a Saintess in my heart…

So, things like reading the Bible or praying to God, which are natural things for other clerics to do, are too boring for me.

If I'm the only one acting bored while the other nuns are praying happily, wouldn't they be suspicious?

I'm only enduring it because it's not the way a Saintess should be, but I don't really like taking classes in the Theology Department.

I like healing injuries from sparring in the Swordmanship Department more than that…

"There must be some freshmen among them…"

I nodded at Stella's murmur.

I'm looking forward to it.

For now, the most important thing to keep an eye on is the new Hero's party member, as I said before.

Well, it's a bit different to call it a new Hero's party.

'It's ambiguous to call someone who was already in the Hero's party a new member.'

Considering how hard it is to recruit someone into the party to defeat the Demon King together.

Especially since this is reality now, so it's even more frustrating.

"I wonder what the freshmen will be like this year."

"I heard they have a lot of respect for their seniors."

"Eh, really?! Then can I be respected too?!"

Uriel asked with wide eyes at the fact that most of the freshmen respect their seniors.

Well, that's understandable.

Maybe they have even more respect for the sophomores than the juniors?

'They even defeated a Demon King Army executive, after all.'

Even though they didn't do it directly, and they mostly just dealt with the grunts, it's still something to be respected for.

Most kids of this age probably never even see a Demon.

It's very difficult to see a Demon unless you go to a place with dense Demonic energy. Even then, it's not even certain that there will be a Demon. That's why that incident happened at the academy, which was thought to be the safest place.

Maleficent, who had not only attacked but had also descended here and intended to open a portal to the Demon realm in the empire, was easily defeated.

Even then, the life vessel, the most important element in the plan, had been weakened so much that the plan couldn't have gone as planned.

Moreover, I heard that Argent, a great mage, was there, so they reverse-calculated her location and forcibly dragged her here to defeat her.

Thinking about what happened last year, it was just an unusual year.

Anyway…

'I have to do my best.'

Right now, there's nothing I can do but make this resolution.

I have to see if they've come to the academy first.

3 - New Semester

'There are so many people...'

Is this the entrance ceremony?

I looked around at the hundreds of people sitting in their seats with a sense of wonder, then started walking to find my own seat.

"[Then I'll go first...]"

Since I'm in the Theology Department... my seat is in the Theology Department area.

I heard that in the first year, you can just sit wherever you arrive, but from the second year onwards, you usually sit according to your designated department to make it easier to distinguish.

'Can I find her here?'

With so many people, it's not easy to find just one person.

Even for me, who can detect everything around without being obstructed, it's still difficult.

But I should at least try to see if she's here, and then I can go find her later. The entrance ceremony will take quite a while anyway, so now is the perfect time.

I focused on Divine Power Detection.

'Hoo...'

What's really unfortunate is that if I try to find her faster and more accurately by putting more power into Divine Power Detection, other people will realize that I'm scanning the area with it.

Right now, I'm spreading it out so subtly that it's not easy for anyone other than Aselina to notice, but if I release more Holy Power here, they won't be able to miss it.

So, I have to spread it carefully around without being noticed by others, but also find her among all these people, which isn't easy at all.

The only fortunate thing is...

'That the other person is an elf.'

Since she's an elf, if I just check her ears, it won't be a big problem to find her.

It's not that elves can't enter the academy, but due to their unique reclusive nature, it's not easy for them to come all the way to the Empire's academy to learn something. So, if she's here, it's practically that elf who was a member of the previous Hero party.

I can't be completely sure, but it's unlikely that an elf who lived in the forest would suddenly go crazy and come to the Empire's academy to learn something if it wasn't her.

Thinking that way, I looked around diligently to find her as quickly as possible, but as time passed, I started sweating.

At first, I thought I could find her quickly, but it was much more difficult than I thought. The entrance ceremony started an hour ago, and I still haven't found her, so I'm starting to wonder if she didn't come at all.

'That can't be... she's definitely here...'

I should have achieved all the achievements, right?

All the raids in the game were successful, and the damage wasn't that great... In fact, in the case of the Maleficent subjugation, it was perfectly prevented with virtually no damage. So, it's very strange that the elf didn't come to find us.

I kept looking with the belief that it couldn't be, but as time went on, I kept wondering if she was really here.

I shouldn't doubt.

I satisfied all the conditions to call the elf in the game, and there's nothing more frustrating than failing in a probability game and not having her come.

While sweating, I kept searching, but after searching for the last student of the first year, I had no choice but to give up.

'She's not here...'

It's not impossible to subjugate the Demon King without the elf, but the difference between having her and not having her is huge...

Firstly, unlike Evan, Stella, and Uriel, who are gradually getting stronger, the elf is a member of the previous Hero party who once sealed the Demon King.

Of course, unlike the other growth-type companions, she is the only previous Hero party member who can join as a companion, a so-called secret member.

Naturally, she starts with her growth already completed, and it's also possible to grow further, so it's much easier.

Especially in the early and mid-game, you can pass through very easily!

If she's there, you don't have to worry about catching the Demon King's pet in the Forest of Enticement, the next final boss.

Because she's a crazy bitch who causes all kinds of natural disasters with just one bow.

'Well... it's meaningless to think about it now...'

It seems like I have no choice but to go to Plan B.

I have no choice but to go out to find the third Relic early and choose the option of sacrificing myself to induce Evan's growth while desperately raising my Holy Power.

As you can see from the name Demon King's pet, it's still weak against Holy Power...

'Does it, does it have to work this time too?'

No, that's a bit...

The first time, I threw myself in confidently because I wanted to experience being eaten once, but after experiencing that going into the stomach wasn't a good idea, I didn't feel like going in anymore.

It's like a sulfur hot spring, and the smell is terrible, so who would want to go in?

I'd close my eyes and go in if it made me stronger, but it doesn't.

Anyway, assuming that the elf isn't there, I need to rethink my plans for the future.

'Annoying, really...'

I have no luck at all.

When I think about it, I don't think I've ever had a lucky day.

Hmm...

That's what I thought...

'What is this...'

What happened?

"Are you the Hero of this era?"

"Uh, yes? Who are you..."

As soon as she heard those words, the girl approached us and looked up at Evan.

"You... you look a lot like that person."

"Uh, huh? Look like..."

Suddenly saying something incomprehensible,

Swoosh

"What..."

"Eek..."

"[...!!]"

"!!"

A cute girl with pointy, light green ears hugged Evan.

Because of the difference in physique, it was closer to hugging his waist and chest, but that's not the problem.

It's absurd enough to hug someone you've just met...

"What?"

"Is she his girlfriend?"

"Wait, isn't that an elf?! That hard-to-see elf!"

"An elf came to our class?!"

"So, Evan's girlfriend is an elf?"

While the classmates were all watching openly, she hugged Evan.

The other kids were looking with dumbfounded eyes, saying things like she's his girlfriend and they're suddenly showing affection in class... Evan was backing away, stuttering as if he didn't understand the sudden situation, but the girl followed him, still hugging him and burying her face in his chest.

"!!!"

That, that, that crazy bitch, what is she doing now...!

"I'm so glad to meet you... I missed you, Hero."

"Um... I, I am the Hero, but can you let go?"

Evan said that while looking at me.

Why is he looking at me?

If he does that, it'll look like I'm being treated like his girlfriend too, and he's a Casanova with two girlfriends.

Isn't there no reason for him to look at me?

More than anything...

'Surely... a woman who likes Evan has appeared... shouldn't I be happy...?'

When I think about it, that's right.

I've been wanting Evan to get a girlfriend all along.

Until recently, I was hoping that at least one of Stella and Uriel would fall for Evan. Unfortunately, for some reason, the two of them didn't fall for Evan.

Not only that, but there were no affection events in the game, so it was practically impossible.

So, I was half giving up, but now I don't have to give up anymore?

Evan said he liked me... but even in a situation where I don't give him my heart, if a beautiful girl with the appearance of an elf like her confesses her love, wouldn't any man have no choice but to accept it?

I can rest assured now.

But...

Surely...

'Why...'

I put my hand on my chest and clenched my fist tightly.

'What is this stuffiness...'

What on earth is this frustrating, annoying, and maddening feeling that I've been feeling since earlier?

I wanted to tear those two apart right away, but as the Saintess, I couldn't do that.

If I did that, the image I've built up so far would collapse again.

But I didn't want to watch them doing that.

In the end, what I chose was...

"[... I'm sorry.]"

I left those words behind and ran out of the class as if escaping.

I couldn't bear to see the two of them hugging each other.

Even with my eyes closed, I kept seeing it... It was like torture to me, who was constantly looking around.

I'd rather not see it, damn it!

Ugh...

I don't know anymore...

4 - New Semester

Fleeing the classroom, I went to a secluded corner where no one was around, bent my knees, and took deep breaths.

'Why did I run away...'

Actually, in that situation just now, I had no reason to run away at all.

Rather, as I said before, a heroine who likes Evan has appeared, so from my perspective of wanting Evan to be happy, I should have been happy, not run away like this.

That's definitely how it should have been…

Seeing the elf hugging him as soon as they met, I felt an unbearable emotion surge up, and fearing that I wouldn't be able to maintain my persona, I decided to run away for now and left the scene.

'Evan...'

It wasn't just Evan.

Stella, Uriel, and the other kids in the class must be wondering what they think of me now. That my-way elf wouldn't particularly care about me, but the others must be very worried because I suddenly ran out of the class.

Especially… I never thought I'd say this, but Evan, who likes me, is probably the most worried.

'Right…?'

He said he likes me, so he wouldn't suddenly like that elf instead of me just because she hugged him once.

Mirnel is pretty, though…

Evan isn't the type to be drawn in by looks alone.

I can't be sure, but…

…

No, what am I even thinking…?

'Wouldn't it be better if Evan liked Mirnel…?'

I was definitely hoping he would build a harem until recently, so why am I thinking this way?

I'm so confused by the thoughts that keep popping into my head.

Come to think of it, I unknowingly flinched when Uriel got close to me last time.

I thought it was just my imagination back then, but this time, my reaction was practically an undeniable admission.

'Do I… like Evan…?'

That's ridiculous…

I mean…

…

'It's not that ridiculous…'

Honestly, I can't admit it because I'm a man, but if I were a normal woman, I would have fallen for him a long time ago, considering how much I've received from him.

What woman wouldn't like a man who rushes to save her whenever she's in danger?

Of course, I'm not exactly in a dangerous situation, but if Evan doesn't try to save me, it's still dangerous for me.

Besides, I'm not invincible, just immortal, and considering the possibility of being kidnapped or suffering from Demonic energy and living a life of pain, Evan throwing himself to save me shouldn't be downplayed.

Above all, he's always considerate of me in small ways and is so kind that he yields everything without ever getting angry.

Just looking at the surrounding people's evaluation of Evan, they can't approach him because he's a Hero, but if he wasn't, he would be swarmed by women trying to woo him.

Of course, it's a bit unusual that Stella and Uriel aren't interested in Evan, but he's that charming.

So, I thought there would soon be a woman who would say she likes Evan, and Evan would eventually like someone and date them.

It was a problem that my expectations were completely off, and the person Evan happened to like was none other than me.

Honestly, until then, I was just troubled about what to do, and I didn't pay much attention to the fact that Evan liked me.

Of course, I couldn't have noticed because I wasn't even thinking about liking Evan?

…

No, it might not have been just trouble.

I felt a strange joy that he chose me, not someone else.

It's just that I didn't realize that I was happy that he chose me because I hadn't realized that I might like Evan at the time, so I couldn't even dare to think in that direction.

As soon as I realized that I might like Evan, all the thoughts I had been having were coming to the surface.

I wasn't sure.

I just couldn't tell if I liked Evan or not.

But that alone was enough to confuse me.

I didn't want to remember why I had those thoughts, what I was thinking, but they kept popping into my head.

I leaned against the wall and sighed deeply.

'I need to go back soon…'

If I don't go back soon, class will start…

I don't know why I'm doing this here.

'Ugh…'

I wanted to go back right away, but it was difficult to control my emotions right now.

If I go back now, I'll definitely show a confused appearance instead of my usual self.

That would be fortunate, but if I were to run into Evan here…

"Aria! Where are you!"

"!!"

Screaming inwardly at the familiar Thought-form, I hid as if running away.

Entering an alley between the academy buildings, I hid myself so that Evan wouldn't see me.

I adjusted the angle while looking at my objective appearance with Divine Power Detection to make sure he couldn't see me, and fortunately, I was able to get through without being caught by Evan.

"Hoo…"

I wondered what kind of face I should make if I got caught.

I checked the time again through the clock tower using Divine Power Detection. Fortunately, there were still about 20 minutes left before class started, so I should calm down as much as possible here and then go back.

'Calm down…'

While calming down, I thought of Mirnel's face.

Even if others didn't, I couldn't help but think of Mirnel, the elf who hugged Evan as soon as she saw him in the game.

Green hair, pointy ears, and a very cute face…

As an elf, she was bound to be beautiful, but Mirnel was even cuter than that.

That's only natural… because she appeared as a Hero party member and heroine in the game.

I'm pretty too since I customized myself, but the grass is always greener on the other side.

"…"

She is pretty, damn it.

Ugh, that's why elves are no good.

They're such freeloaders.

Ten minutes later,

Evan, who went to find Aria who had run out, ended up returning to the class without any success.

"Haa…"

It was a frustrating situation for Evan.

He confessed to Aria that he liked her and then showed her the sight of him hugging another woman, so even if it was Aria, the shock must have been great.

So, even if she ran away after seeing him, it wasn't Aria's fault.

The ones at fault in this situation were himself for not pushing her away, and…

“…Mirnel, was it?”

The elf girl in front of him.

"Yes, it is."

"Do elves hug people they meet for the first time?"

"I'm sorry about that. I would apologize if you didn't like it, but… don't humans like it when a pretty woman hugs them? I don't understand why the reaction isn't better."

"Well… that depends on the situation… It's embarrassing when other people are watching."

"I don't really care about other people's opinions."

"More than that, aren't you blatantly saying that you're cute…?"

Stella said in disbelief, and Mirnel turned her head with her unique expressionless face and looked at Stella, saying.

"That's what I said when I looked at my appearance from an objective point of view."

"Uh… no… it's true, but…"

As Mirnel said, she was beautiful.

She was small because her body hadn't fully grown yet, but no one could deny that she was beautiful.

It was natural since she was an elf, but it was absurd to see her say it so blatantly.

"Anyway… Aria was surprised because you suddenly hugged her like that. You should apologize when she comes back."

Evan sighed deeply and said.

He was also thinking of apologizing for causing such a commotion when she came back.

However,

For some reason, there was no reaction from Mirnel.

When Evan raised his head and looked at her, she stared at Evan with a blank expression and said as if he was saying something strange.

"Hmm? I don't understand that, Hero. Isn't it stranger to be surprised by just a hug?"

"…"

"I understand that it's not something you should do when you first meet, but you should apologize to you about that, not to that girl, shouldn't you?"

Are you kidding me?

Evan slapped his forehead as he looked at the frustrating elf in front of him.

5 - New Semester

I barely managed to pull myself together and return.

Looking back now, I felt foolish for making such a fuss over Mirnel and Evan simply hugging each other.

It was something that could very well… well, not really, but anyway, it wasn't something I should have been so surprised about.

I calmed myself down by essentially brainwashing myself and returned to the classroom.

"Oh, you're back?"

"Are you okay?"

What?

It was chaotic just a moment ago, but it's quiet again?

Just in case, I looked around for Mirnel, but she was just sitting there, spacing out.

She probably has no idea what she just did, right?

Thinking about it that way, I felt a bit resentful.

But there's nothing I can do just because I feel resentful.

Still, it seems Evan said something, so I don't think I need to step in and say anything.

I went back to my seat.

…

…

Huh?

Wait a minute.

'Something's not right?'

Come to think of it, we're in the second year, so why is she in our class?

She wasn't with us in the first year, yet she confidently joined the second year, so it felt so natural that I didn't even notice.

'What… what is this?'

What's going on?

I looked at Mirnel with a bewildered expression, but she didn't seem interested in me, only looking at Evan.

In the meantime, the professor came in, and the first morning assembly after the entrance ceremony began.

And…

"Ah, by the way, we have a new student. So… Mirnel Halberd?"

At that, Mirnel raised her hand without a word.

The professor nodded and left the classroom, simply telling us to prepare for our next class.

It was a ridiculously brief introduction.

Well, it's only natural, but we don't actually take classes together here; it's just a class where students with similar levels are gathered, so this was normal.

We take classes in the departments we've chosen, so we're only in the same class in name only.

"Well, it's my first time at the academy, so I have high expectations."

"Oh, really?"

"Hero, you must be in the Swordsmanship Department?"

"Well… yeah."

That elf…

She's been ignoring Stella, Uriel, and me and talking to Evan since earlier, and I don't know why I feel like hitting her.

I don't think I've ever felt such intense anger in my life as the Saintess.

When I first saw her, I was just surprised, but after finally calming down and seeing her act like that again, I'm starting to get angry.

I wasn't the only one who thought so; Stella and Uriel also came up to me and started complaining about how rude that elf, Mirnel, was.

Even Uriel, who has a kind personality, looked sad, wondering why she was being ignored…

In a way, she was acting exactly as she was set up to in the game.

In fact, she was famous for being a real bitch in the game.

Of course, if the player character was the Hero, she would actually approach me and show affection… Considering that Evan is the Hero, she's acting exactly as her character was set up to be.

But the fact that she's acting according to the game's settings and the fact that she's being a bitch and annoying are two different things.

Honestly, I wanted to beat her up.

But even if it was someone else, antagonizing her wasn't a good idea. She possesses more power than anyone else here.

Although she's weaker than Argent, that's no reason to belittle her power. In the first place, the mage had the highest potential in the game, assuming you were looking at the highest possible stats, so this could be seen as thorough historical accuracy.

Although Evan will surpass her soon, she's the strongest right now… and if she joins our Hero party, it would be incredibly helpful, so it's best to cater to her for now.

"I'm in the Swordsmanship Department too. Shall we go together?"

"C-Could you please back off a little…?"

"Hmm? As I said before, there's no need to worry about the people around us. Isn't this better for you?"

"No, I mean, I…"

Evan looked at me, looking hesitant about whether to say something or not.

Evan, realizing I was watching, looked surprised and kept pushing her away, telling her not to cling to him so tightly, but she kept clinging to him like a leech.

"Come on, let's go quickly."

"Please just get off me…!"

Yeah…

Crack.

"Wow… she's a real psycho…"

Uriel nodded slightly at Stella's muttering.

Yeah.

She's a real psycho.

I'm starting to crave some hot World Tree stew.

If she's brewing water with a branch, is she a carpenter?

"Aria… you look angry…?"

"Well, of course. Her boyfriend's about to be stolen."

"[I-I'm not her boyfriend!]"

What are they talking about all of a sudden?!

Stella, saying that it would be stranger to maintain composure when her boyfriend is about to be stolen, giggled and I told her not to say weird things.

But Stella asked why I was getting angry if that was the case, and if a friend gets a girlfriend, shouldn't I be happy for them? I couldn't answer and just stammered.

No… it's a little different from that…

This is…

Um…

This is that.

"[Th-That… when a close friend becomes happy, you become unhappy… that, that's what it is.]"

"Aria… you know that doesn't make sense, right…?"

"…"

Damn it, that didn't work.

I feel like all the image I've built up so far is collapsing at once.

"You've always wished for other people's happiness, there's no way you'd think something like that."

"[That's…]"

"That's what you call love, you idiot."

Gyaaaaah!

I screamed inwardly at Stella's words.

I didn't expect her to say it so confidently.

Of course, I know that too.

It would be stranger if I didn't know.

Whenever I watch romance stories and see characters who don't understand their feelings for the other person, I always think, why are they so oblivious? Isn't it stranger not to know?

Of course I know about this feeling.

But the reason I'm acting like this is because I don't want to admit it.

How can I admit something like this?

I wanted to argue with Stella right away, but I had nothing to say.

I know it in my head, but I can't admit it in my heart.

Of course, logically, it wouldn't make sense unless I liked Evan, so I couldn't refute Stella's confident words and was KO'd.

Uriel, who was listening next to me, tilted her head and asked Stella if Aria liked Evan.

It's amazing that Uriel didn't notice it at all.

Ah.

Damn it.

How did this happen?

At first, I was just planning to move as efficiently as possible, defeat the Demon King, and go home… I was a bad person who didn't hesitate to use other people's guilt for that purpose.

In fact… I knew.

That this is reality.

A real world based on the world of the game, and if I give up here, the world will head towards destruction by the Demon King, who is no different from a disaster.

A disaster with the alias of incomprehensible unknown fear…

What they worship as the Demon King is essentially a disaster.

A disaster that devours everything in this world when it descends.

Maybe the reason I haven't admitted it all along… is to avoid feeling these emotions.

"[I… I'm going to go to class.]"

No matter how much I try to sort out my thoughts, it's not enough.

Whether I like Evan, or whether it's just the feeling of looking at my favorite character.

In fact, I still understood it in my head, but I just couldn't admit that I had come to like a man…

That was all.

"Aria…"

I turned my back on Stella, who was looking at me with a pitiful expression, and headed towards the Theology Department.

I wish I could get some advice from someone.

I'm not in a position to receive advice from someone, but rather in a position to give advice…

I could only sigh deeply.

It's all because of that damn elf…

6 - New Semester

“Haa…”

Evan sighed deeply, recalling what had just happened.

Ever since the elf Mirnel had arrived, he felt like he was going crazy.

She was a complete stranger to him, yet she was expressing affection as if they were well-acquainted, making him wonder if he had somehow become close to her without realizing it.

But no matter how much he thought about it, nothing like that had ever happened…

Elves were a completely new race to him…

And now that he had met an elf who was being so friendly, he was starting to wonder if all elves were like this.

Even now, she was ignoring his requests to back off and kept trying to cling to him, which was frustrating.

The elf, who introduced herself as Mirnel Halberd, probably didn't intend it, but Evan could easily imagine how it must have looked to Aria, whom he liked.

‘I need to apologize…’

He must have looked like a fickle man.

Like he was two-timing.

He had confessed his feelings directly, yet was so afraid of hearing her answer that he even said he would wait until after he defeated the Demon King, only to show her such a sight.

It wouldn't be strange if Aria was disappointed.

The more he thought about Aria's expression of shock as she fled the classroom the moment she saw Mirnel hugging him, the more he couldn't help but think that way.

Wouldn't it be stranger if she didn't notice?

Even if Aria didn't know much about that sort of thing, if the man she liked was with another woman like that…

This wouldn't do.

It was almost time for class, but he couldn't let this misunderstanding continue.

He didn't particularly care about other people's opinions, but even if he was fine, he couldn't let Aria be misunderstood because of him.

He couldn't allow Aria to be hurt because of him.

Just then, Evan turned to face Mirnel, who was looking at him, and with a serious expression, he opened his mouth.

“I'm sorry, but I'd appreciate it if you didn't come any closer. We're strangers, and we're not in that kind of relationship, are we?”

Despite Evan's sharp tone, Mirnel remained unfazed, simply staring at him with her usual blank expression.

It was clearly strange.

Just a moment ago, she had been clinging to him, saying she liked him, but now she was only looking at him, not approaching any further, and not even looking at him with affection.

Evan felt a sense of incongruity at her behavior, and as a thought suddenly occurred to him, he shuddered.

‘Come to think of it, even when she hugged me earlier…’

Her actions were definitely those of someone who liked him, but it was a bit of a stretch to say that Mirnel was expressing affection towards him.

It was true that she had shown him a very friendly reaction, but as the person involved, he was even more certain of one thing.

When she hugged him earlier, and even now as she looked at him, there was something in her gaze…

Rather than a romantic feeling of loving someone, it felt more like she was longing for someone as she looked at him.

At the time, he was so overwhelmed by the thought of being seen by the other students, and especially by Aria, that he couldn't think deeply about it, but now that he had calmed down and thought about it again, there were many strange things.

Evan looked up and met Mirnel's gaze.

As expected, Mirnel was still looking at him with an unreadable expression.

“Can you tell me why you acted like that as soon as you saw me?”

He asked Mirnel carefully, trying not to offend her.

Then, Mirnel met Evan's gaze and said…

“Hmm, I suppose it was unpleasant. My apologies.”

She bowed her head and apologized so easily that it was almost anticlimactic.

It was completely different from her behavior just a moment ago, when she seemed completely unaware of her wrongdoing.

Did that mean that all her actions earlier were intentional?

Evan was puzzled as to why she would do such a thing, even though she knew she was wrong enough to apologize so readily.

“There's no need to hide it, is there? In the first place… even if my grades are good, don't you think it's strange to start right away from the second year?”

“…!”

Evan's eyes widened at those words.

It was something he hadn't paid any attention to, but now that he thought about it, it was definitely strange.

Although he had only been a student at the academy for a year, he was not ignorant of the academy's common sense.

However…

“She could be a returning academy student, right?”

The fact that the other students hadn't questioned her much earlier was also because most of them simply saw her as a returning academy student.

Of course, it wasn't unreasonable to think that way.

But the very fact that she was bringing up this story meant that she was saying that she wasn't a returning student, so Evan didn't continue the conversation any further.

As expected, Mirnel nodded and said.

“Yes, Argent intended for most people to think that way.”

“…You know about Argen Headmaster…”

Evan suddenly thought of Argen Isis's past.

If she was an elf who knew her, who had been in charge of the magic in the Hero's party of salvation, there was really only one person.

The archer who was in charge of scouting for the Hero's party of salvation.

She wielded a longbow that others couldn't even dream of handling as if it were an extension of her own limbs, and her nimble and quiet footsteps were so silent that no one could notice them, and it was said that there was nothing that her sharp blue arrows, forged with the magic of nature, couldn't pierce.

It was said that her prowess was unmatched even among elves, with rumors that she could shoot an arrow into the sky and turn it into a rain of arrows that pierced hundreds or thousands of enemies, or that a giant arrow forged with magic could pierce mountains.

“Mirnel… Hilberd…?!”

As he recalled that name, he was finally able to recognize that the elf in front of him had the same name as the legendary archer who had been known at that time.

If you told a normal human that they had the same name as someone from hundreds of years ago, they would assume that their parents had named them after that person, but it was different for elves.

They were a long-lived race that lived for hundreds of years as a matter of course.

That was not the case for them, who usually lived for a thousand years.

“Y-you're really Mirnel Hilberd…?”

“You don't have to use honorifics. How else could I be called a companion of the great mage?”

Mirnel took out her longbow as if it were nothing special.

“Will this do?”

Artume, the longbow favored by that legendary elf.

Evan shouldn't have been able to recognize it, but for some reason…

Evan, as if possessed, took the longbow and looked around.

'Why… does it feel so familiar?'

"…Is something wrong?"

Mirnel, who was watching Evan's eyes flutter with a strange sense of déjà vu, as if he had seen it before, asked if something was wrong.

"Ah, no… sorry."

"Well… the reason I hugged you as soon as I saw you is none other than this. The Hero of Salvation… you and he are similar."

Evan's eyes widened at those words.

"…Me?"

Mirnel nodded at Evan's surprised reaction, a wistful expression on her face as if recalling that time.

"Your appearance is completely different, but… your aura was similar. As soon as I saw you, the Hero, I couldn't help but think of him. Well… it wasn't like I liked him romantically, and he already had someone, and to me, he was just a close friend."

I see,

No, wait a minute.

"…"

Then I don't understand even more?

Evan, who was listening to Mirnel's story, felt something strange in her words.

She was saying that she didn't like him, that he was just a close friend, a bosom buddy, but that was strange.

Wasn't it strange to hug someone of the opposite sex who was just a friend?

Evan cautiously asked her.

“Then… why did you hug me if you didn't like me?”

Mirnel tilted her head as if asking the obvious.

Was there such an obvious reason that she would react like that?

“Isn't that how humans express affection? Affection doesn't necessarily mean romantic love, does it?”

“…”

Evan was speechless at Mirnel's confident answer.

Elves, who only protect the World Tree, do not know the hearts of humans.

That was also true of Mirnel Hilberd, a member of the Hero's party…

7 - New Semester

"Sister?"

I flinched at the sudden Thought-form voice calling me.

Turning around to see what was the matter, I saw a nun from the Theology Department approaching me with a worried expression.

Judging by her unfamiliar face, she seemed to be a new nun.

Most people find me difficult to approach...

Of course, I was no different from the other nuns here, so it wasn't as if there were no nuns who treated me normally.

It was just that they had gradually become more comfortable with me over time, not that they had treated me so casually from the first time they saw me.

It was a strange feeling.

I didn't think there was anyone in the academy who didn't recognize me...

'Well... there's only one blonde girl who always walks around with her eyes closed in the academy, so...'

There may be many blondes, but not many blonde girls walk around with their eyes closed.

"[Thank you for your concern. I'm fine.]"

I didn't want to cause any unnecessary worry, so I replied.

Despite my answer, the nun still seemed worried and asked me to talk to her if I had anything to discuss.

I suppose she's a true cleric.

Kindness is a basic requirement.

It's only natural since she's grown up as a nun.

Sometimes when I'm here, I feel like I'm being purified...

"[Thank you. So...]"

"I'm Teresa, sister."

"[Sister Teresa. As I said before, nothing's really wrong.]"

"I-Is that so...?"

She seemed to have a lot to say, but when I kept saying that there was nothing wrong, she seemed to think that I didn't want to talk and left as if she were running away.

Nuns usually aren't this persistent, so seeing her act like this, I must have been sighing and looking too worried.

Only then did my vision clear a little, and when I looked around using Divine Power Detection, I realized that everyone except me was looking at me with worried eyes.

Ah... so many people were watching.

Well, I'm a celebrity in the Theology Department, so it's not strange that so many people are constantly watching me.

However, even so, it wasn't a pleasant situation to feel so much attention on every little thing I did.

Hmm... If I show that I'm shaken because of Evan, it might create bad rumors about him, so I should be careful.

The way I looked this morning could be seen as a woman running away in shock after seeing Evan having an affair with her own eyes.

Well... Mirnel was the one who did that, so maybe there will be rumors of a love affair between Mirnel and Evan.

Thinking about it that way made me feel even worse.

It's not like we've been friends until now and then confessed that we actually liked each other. It was absurd that he did that as soon as we met.

Even in the game, the Hero default character, or when I chose the Hero job, showed affection in that way, but I didn't know it would be to this extent.

'I need to be careful...'

I feel like my mask of hiding my emotions has become much thinner lately.

Things that I used to brush off without a second thought now make me overreact internally, and it seems to be showing on the outside.

I need to be careful not to show this side of me to other people I don't know, even if Evan, Stella, and Uriel already know...

Honestly, it would be best if they didn't notice either, but it seems like they've already caught on...

I want to maintain my image as the Saintess as much as possible, but it seems like that's going to be difficult.

'Should I really get counseling...'

It's not easy to make a firm decision by myself.

But telling this story to someone else is also a problem...

The reason I'm so worried is because I was originally a man, but I can't reveal that I was a man to other people.

In the first place, if the Saintess suddenly said that she was a man in her past life, who would believe her instead of thinking she was crazy?

It wouldn't be any different even if they were my friends.

They would only worry about me more...

'Ugh...'

It's all because of that damn elf.

I think I said the same thing last time, but I'll just assume it's my imagination.

Sigh.

Aria has become strange.

Stella and Uriel thought so.

And Stella knew why.

'How can she not fall for a man who has saved her so many times?'

The way Evan has acted so far is enough to make any woman fall in love with him.

Frankly, Stella thought that Evan would be a very good match for Aria.

If it weren't for that elf who suddenly appeared, she would have realized it smoothly.

"Haa..."

After the first class since returning to the academy, Stella returned to the dormitory and saw that the room was unusually dark.

"Aria?"

Aria, who has a disability, always turns on the lights for me when I come back, but for some reason, the lights are not on.

I was a little worried that she hadn't come back yet, but Stella walked inside and checked, just in case, and saw that the blanket was bulging out strangely.

It looked like a snake had swallowed an elephant...

T-This is...

'S-So cute...!'

It's deadly...!

She usually acts like a devout nun, but she sometimes shows these cute sides, so I can't help but like her.

In the first place, there's no reason to dislike Aria.

She probably already noticed that I was here with Divine Power Detection, but since she didn't greet me, I carefully approached and sat down quietly to let her know that I was here.

"Aria?"

I called out once, just in case, but there was no answer.

She's not the type to ignore me, so if she's not answering...

'Could she be asleep?'

Aria is almost never asleep at this time, so I didn't even think about it.

Stella lifted the blanket slightly to check Aria's face.

"..."

Aria was sleeping peacefully with her eyes closed.

But Stella, who had been with her for a long time, knew for sure.

Aria wasn't sleeping, she was just pretending to be asleep.

"You're not asleep, are you?"

So I smiled and asked if she was awake.

Then Aria flinched.

"[...How did you know...?]"

"I've been with you for so long, of course I'd know."

We've only been together for a little over a year.

But even though we've only known each other vaguely during that time, we've been eating and sleeping in the same room, so it would be strange if I didn't know.

More than that...

'Is she still heartbroken about what happened back then?'

Aria didn't seem to realize her own feelings at all, but that wasn't the case at all in the eyes of the people around her.

Well, it's only natural that she didn't realize it.

Aria, who has lived as a nun since she was a child and has lived a life of living for others, must be unfamiliar with the emotion of love itself.

Stella hoped that Aria would get along with Evan and be happy.

Aria has sacrificed too much so far.

So I thought she deserved this much reward.

It would also be a friend's job to show her the right path and help her move forward.

'I've never done it before...'

Not only that, but as a friend, Stella only had Aria, Uriel, and Evan as people she could call friends.

Aria is the closest of them.

She was going to push herself to teach Aria what love is.

'...I hope it helps a little...?'

She doesn't know much either, but she doesn't think she knows nothing about love because she's read various books.

She's just worried that Aria might change strangely because of her teachings.

There might be some wrong information, so I should lay the groundwork by saying that not everything is correct and that she should take it with a grain of salt.

Stella took a deep breath as if she was nervous and opened her mouth to Aria.

Hoping to comfort and help her even a little.

New Semester (Interlude)

"Um… I'm not sure what to say… Isn't it because that Mirnel, the elf, and Evan were stuck together all day?"

"[…I don't know.]"

Stella chuckled at Aria's silent answer.

I thought she was someone who didn't usually lie, but she's just a girl after all… she thought.

She herself had never been in love, but she had read in various books that women change more when they are in love.

She didn't know if it was true or not, but just seeing Aria's behavior today, she felt like she knew a little bit about how much that feeling of love could change a person.

And since it was changing her for the better, she, as her friend, had no reason to refuse it.

"[…Stella.]"

"Yeah?"

"[I have something I want to ask you. Can I ask?]"

"What is it?"

What could it be?

Aria sometimes asked questions, but it was practically the first time she had ever asked her directly about something so serious.

Stella's heart began to pound.

"[Uh… well…]"

"You can tell me when you're ready. I'll answer anything."

"[…]"

Perhaps she felt a little more at ease with her words, Aria nodded after a moment of silence and fell back into thought.

Is she organizing in her head how to talk about the feelings she has?

About ten minutes passed like that.

Aria opened her mouth again, as if she had finished organizing her thoughts to some extent.

However, she was still holed up in her blanket as she spoke.

"[I'm going to give you an example…]"

"That would be better. It'll be easier for me to understand than if you were talking about the feelings you're actually feeling."

Aria thanked Stella for understanding and began to tell her story.

"[If, for example, you suddenly became a man, Stella…]"

"Huh?"

Stella was momentarily puzzled by the sudden talk of being a man, but she decided to go along with it for now, since she had decided to explain by giving an example to make it easier to compare her feelings.

"[You were originally a woman, and you'd still think of yourself that way, right?]"

"Um… I guess so."

Stella didn't really care much about her gender.

Wizards don't usually care about that kind of thing.

Some women who wielded swords as knights regretted being born female because of the physical differences between men and women, but magic was just a field of study, so there was no difference between men and women.

Those who were truly obsessed with magic didn't care if they were men or women.

"[But if… you had to date a woman, would you be able to date her with a normal heart?]"

"Ah…"

I see what she's talking about.

Stella was finally able to understand what Aria was talking about.

Clerics basically have a heart that loves everyone without discriminating against anyone, rather than having a heart that loves a specific person romantically.

However, even though Universal love is the basis, it is not frowned upon for priests or nuns to marry someone they have in their hearts.

Rather, marriage is considered a virtue, so it is not strange for nuns to have someone in their hearts.

However, they should not have such feelings for a man who is already in love with someone else… In other words, the Goddess would not look unfavorably on Aria, the Saintess, having such feelings for Evan, who does not yet have someone he likes.

But it seemed to feel a little different to Aria.

Aria, who had lived her whole life as a cleric, without regard for men or women, saving countless people, was falling in love with someone for the first time as a woman.

Moreover, she hadn't finished everything yet, so she thought it was absurd to have such feelings for Evan.

So, she had been trying to control her heart, thinking that she could never have such feelings while looking at a man and thinking of herself as a man, but that had burst out today when she saw the elf and Evan together.

It would be different from a real man looking at a man and feeling love, but she was thinking that it was similar to that feeling, so she was just guessing that she had used this kind of example.

It's not that everything she's said so far is true, but she's just using an analogy to talk about feelings that are as similar as possible to the feelings she's feeling now, so she's just guessing like this.

Even so, it was true that it was an analogy she had never thought of before, so she felt a little dazed.

"Um… so you're asking if I could date a woman if I became a man here?"

"[Yes… or would you date a man even if you became a man?]"

"Um…"

This is definitely a difficult question.

It didn't seem like she could come up with an answer by just thinking about it a little.

In the first place, it was absurd to think that she could make a proper judgment since she had never experienced such a situation.

However, it wasn't too difficult to talk about what she thought about it, or to suggest how to think about it objectively, even if it was just a story to be told with imagination.

"I think it's just a matter of whether you care about social perceptions, or just your own feelings… or both."

"[That means…]"

"Well, that's it. If I care a little more about social perceptions, I'd probably date a woman since I'm a man now, right?"

It's not a country that looks favorably on homosexuality.

She, too, is a woman, so she'll probably fall in love with a man someday, but she honestly doesn't know if she could love a man if she became a man herself.

She'd have to become one to know, but she can't become a man, can she?

"On the other hand, if I only care about my own feelings… wouldn't I just date whoever I like, whether they're a man or a woman, whether I'm a man or a woman?"

If she only cared about her own feelings, it would be a declaration that she would just date whoever she liked, whether they were a man or a woman.

Aria's eyes widened at the open-minded words, but she closed them again when she realized that this was not Stella's opinion.

"If I care about both, I'd think it's better to date a woman, but if the other person is a man… I might break up for the sake of that man's happiness."

Everyone thinks differently.

That doesn't change whether you're a man or a woman, or if your gender changes.

If a heterosexual couple suddenly has one of them change their gender due to some incident, it could be called a tragedy.

If they continue to whisper love no matter how the other person changes, it could be called a beautiful love…

Unfortunately, love in reality is not such a beautiful story.

Appearance was as important as the other person's heart.

No matter how beautiful a person's heart is, it would be difficult to hear good things if their appearance is not good.

That includes whether they are a man or a woman, regardless of whether they are handsome or ugly.

But…

"I think I'd date a woman."

That's what Stella thought.

"[That's…]"

"Well, it's not like anyone else knows that I was originally a woman. Even if they did, what are they going to do about a man and a woman dating?"

"…"

"If I was originally dating a man… wouldn't it depend on how that man sees me after I turn into a man whether we stay together or not?"

If a man's woman suddenly turns into a man, can they really continue dating?

Stella doesn't really think so.

At that point, there would be no one who would like her as her original self anymore, so it meant that she would continue dating in the way that a man loves a woman.

In a way, wouldn't that be the most rational decision as a wizard?

"I see… if I became a man here…"

Stella turned her head and looked at Aria.

"Should I just go out with Aria then?"

"[S-Stop joking, Stella…]"

"Hehe, I'm not joking. Well… you don't have to think about it so complicatedly. Just do what your heart tells you to do. What does the old you matter? The present is the most important."

"[…!]"

Aria, who had been silent for a while at Stella's words, answered quietly as if she had finished thinking.

"[Thank you, Stella.]"

Has she finally sorted out her thoughts a little?

Stella smiled and nodded at Aria's answer.

Hoping that everything would work out.

1 - Exam Preparation

A month had passed since I returned to the academy.

At first, everyone felt awkward about the sudden appearance of a new friend named Mirnel Halberd, but thanks to Uriel's efforts, they managed to become somewhat close.

Evan was someone I didn't need to get close to in the first place, so I'll set him aside. There were Uriel and Stella, but Uriel was naturally sociable, so there were no problems getting close to her. Stella was a bit of a problem, but Uriel handled that well too.

There was only one problem...

"M-Maybe she's just shy..."

"[Is that so...]"

Evan said with an awkward smile, but who would believe that?

The very idea of that elf being shy is absurd... I can't even imagine it.

'This isn't easy...'

It was hard to get close to me.

To be precise, she was trying not to get close to me.

'Why is she doing this?'

Anyone would think I couldn't even hear Thought-forms.

Is it because she's an elf and can't understand Thought-forms at all?

If that were the case, I wouldn't say anything, but ignoring someone's words when that's not the case is incredibly unpleasant to me.

I feel like I want to curse her out for ignoring me.

I've been living as a Saintess, suppressing my emotions, and I never thought I'd explode over something like this.

The others at least listen to me, but she doesn't even hear me. What am I supposed to do?

As you can tell from what I just thought, it's not like I haven't tried to approach her.

Rather, I'm the one who needs to get close to her, so I have to use every method possible to become friends.

Of course, I've tried talking to her first and being kind, but aside from a brief thank you, she avoids even talking to me, which is frustrating.

It seemed she wasn't very happy about getting close to me.

'What's the problem?'

I could understand if I had done something wrong, but she just answers me vaguely and sticks to Evan all the time, which is starting to irritate me.

Of course, Evan pushes her away every time she clings to him, but if she were the type to give up that easily, she would have given up a long time ago.

Anyway... I'm just annoyed.

I try to be friendly, but she doesn't seem interested in getting close, and yet she gets along well with everyone else.

She's never met me before, but she's showing so much that she doesn't want to be friends with me, which means I must have done something wrong in the past...

But I just met that elf for the first time.

In other words, it's only been a month since we met.

Of course, I've seen her a lot in the game, so I know everything from what she likes to what kind of past she has, but there's no way that elf knows that, so it's basically like she hated me from the moment she saw me.

I really don't know why.

'Why...?'

No matter how I think about it, I don't think I've done anything wrong, so it doesn't seem like she hates me because I did something wrong... And it's not like she likes Evan and is jealous of a rival, because she's not openly hostile, but rather just trying not to deal with me.

If she really wanted to be wary, she would have gotten angry or tried to harass me in some way.

'Not that she's the type to do that...'

Anyway, she wouldn't just ignore me like that...

'So there must be another reason.'

There wasn't really anything in the settings I know that would make her hate me, or rather, the Saintess.

There was almost no information about the Saintess from the time of the Hero of Salvation party.

All that was known was that the Saintess sacrificed herself for everyone and died after sealing the Demon King...

If something happened there that made that elf uncomfortable with me, it would explain the current situation, but it would only explain it, not make it understandable.

How can I understand if I don't know what happened...?

'I wish there was a way to win her over...'

All I know are the settings, so it seems impossible to win her over right now.

In the first place, that elf wasn't a character whose settings were revealed that much in the game, so it's even harder to come up with a way to win her over.

But I can't just let things continue like this.

So I need to do something... The problem is, as I said before, I don't have a good method.

'I guess I have no choice but to wait for an opportunity.'

I need to create as many opportunities as possible to get close to her, but all I can do right now is wait for an opportunity to get close to her.

I don't know what that will be.

Has time already passed this much?

It seems I'm not the only one who feels that time is passing too quickly.

Uriel sighed deeply, saying that the exams were already approaching.

Come to think of it, she's always hated taking exams.

"Hmm... Is it already exam season..."

I nodded at Evan's murmur.

As a month had passed, everyone was already preparing for the exams.

I heard that this exam would cover the parts that we couldn't take last time.

Of course, if the story goes as it did in the game...

'It'll be there, right?'

Forest of Enticement.

Argent is going, so there's no need to worry about safety, but the others don't seem to think so.

I guess it's inevitable that they feel uneasy, since something always happens every time they take an exam.

So much so that not only the other students, but also Stella and Uriel, who are supposed to be the Future Hero party, and Evan are worried.

I already know what's going to happen, so I just need to prepare for it...

'It's hard to tell them that something will happen in the Forest of Enticement this time...'

If I told them that I know everything that will happen in the future, it would definitely be better than anything else for preparing...

Unfortunately, it's difficult to explain this again.

Above all, what's going to happen this time is like a natural disaster, so it's even harder to say.

It's not exactly a natural disaster, since it's a dungeon that was created when the ancient Demon King's pet was sealed, but it's a bit far from being a natural disaster.

'It's just a matter of subjugating it now or later...'

Anyway, it will eventually pop out of the Forest of Enticement and try to attack us, so I decided that it would be better to subjugate it in advance while it's still less powerful.

If we subjugate it in the first semester of the second year, it becomes a hidden boss, and if we subjugate it in the second semester, it becomes a regular boss.

The problem is that.

If we don't go now, we won't be able to get the third Relic.

The Relic of the Earth.

The so-called Relic of Sealing, 'Umdium's Gift'.

It's the Relic that was used to seal that Magic beast...

'With that, the three sacred treasures are complete.'

With these three, there's virtually no problem in subjugating the Demon King.

Of course, it's still dangerous because of who we're dealing with, but the difference between having this Relic and not having it is huge.

Anyway... This is something that needs to be resolved without preparing in advance.

Whatever it is, it's still something that needs to be subjugated.

'I need to make a plan.'

I needed to find a way to enter that secret passage with everyone, including Mirnel.

'If I can just lead them to that path, there's no problem with going in together.'

Leading them to the path...

In the past, I would have used dangerous methods that could have hurt someone to lead them there, but I don't want to do that now.

Even though it was unavoidable to become a Saintess back then, I almost killed Danas.

I will never let that happen again.

In the Forest of Enticement, you can form the team you want to enter, so I need to figure out how to lead these five people there and enter.

I just need to figure that out.

I quietly watched Mirnel, constantly thinking about how to lead them there.

2 - Exam Preparation

“[I heard we’re continuing the test from last time, right?]”

Since this test was a continuation of the one we were supposed to take last semester, the basics of what we had to do weren't much different from then.

Only the location where we were taking the test had changed.

The Forest of Enticement.

Just the name makes it sound like it lures victims in to turn them into nutrients, and that's exactly what it does.

This forest is based on the concept of insectivorous plants that exist in reality, like Venus flytraps and nepenthes.

If you go in there without proper protective gear and preparation, you could die a sudden and miserable death.

Of course, that's only true for ordinary people with no power. Since we're talking about kids with enough power to attend this academy, there's little chance of dying, though they might get hurt.

Besides, we'd be going in wearing protective gear made by Argent himself, magical tools called Artifacts, so there wouldn't be any problems.

Just like last time, we'd all be wearing magical tools that use teleportation magic if something happened.

I never thought the magical tools we made to prepare for Maleficent's attack last time would be helpful in this way.

“[Did you guys decide on your practical exam teams?]”

Of course, teams had to be decided a month before the exam.

The information about the dungeon is mostly public, and the test involves planning how to clear the dungeon with your chosen team and then seeing if you follow the plan and whether you clear the dungeon or not.

So, the most important thing is the team.

It's about deciding how to form the team beforehand.

Stella answered my question as if I were saying something strange.

“What's there to decide? Can't we just go with five people including Mirnel?”

Uriel nodded in agreement with Stella's words.

Well… that's true.

The team limit is exactly five people, and you can take the practical exam with a team of your choice, so if we're going to take the practical exam anyway, it's best to go with five people, including Mirnel, who we're all close to.

I was planning to recruit Mirnel anyway, so I want that too.

Because that's how we can defeat the monster at the very bottom and bring out the Relic, according to the original plan.

But one problem remained.

‘Will Mirnel join?’

The question was whether that elf would want to be on the same team as us.

Of course, if I weren't here, she would definitely join…

The problem is that the elf dislikes me.

More precisely, she's wary of me.

As I said before, this exam is all about doing it the way you want, so you can form a team or, if you're confident, do it alone. If that's the case, she can just not join and clear the dungeon alone.

She'll get a basic score for teamwork, but clearing the dungeon alone proves her ability, so she'll effectively get a score higher than the first-place team.

If I weren't here, she would have come to us and taken the exam with a team, but since I'm here, it's not clear whether Mirnel, who is wary of me, will join us for the exam or just take the exam alone rather than be on the same team as me.

From Mirnel's point of view, it's just a choice, but from my point of view, the story is a bit different.

If she doesn't come here and goes to take the exam alone, saying that she can do the exam alone anyway, then we have to go and defeat the Magic beast with four people.

It's not impossible, but the problem is that if Mirnel doesn't come, we have to go to Plan B, which is to bring the monster out and defeat it with Argent.

The opponent is strong for four people to fight, so someone could get seriously injured or even die.

Evan has already achieved his second awakening and has become much stronger, so it's not impossible to defeat it, and he won't get seriously injured, but Stella and Uriel are still too weak to face the Magic beast.

However, Evan can't defeat it alone, so the four of us have to fight with all our might, and if we fight like that, someone could get seriously hurt.

I'm the Saintess, so I can heal them, but I don't want to hurt Stella, Uriel, or Evan by choosing a difficult path when there are other good ways.

But if we defeat it later, there won't be another chance…

Because we have to get the Relic.

There's only one answer.

‘Should I ask Evan to ask her?’

She wouldn't join if I asked, but if Evan earnestly asks, wouldn't Mirnel, who is a Hero-lover, have no choice but to join?

Even though I'm on the same team, she can just ignore me as usual.

That's her problem.

Anyway… if I just tell Evan that the reason I want to be on the same team is that I want to get closer to her, he won't think it's too difficult to ask Mirnel.

Everyone knows that I've been making various efforts to get closer to Mirnel, so I think he'll grant my request to ask Mirnel to join our team because I want to get closer to her this time.

“[Hey… Evan?]”

“Yeah?”

“[I have a favor to ask…]”

It's rare for me to ask for favors, but it's not like it never happens.

Perhaps because of that, Evan seemed to think it was a serious matter and asked what was wrong with a sharp expression.

…

Is it that important to make such an expression…?

Anyway…

“[Um… I want to become closer with Mirnel, so could you please suggest that she join our team? Please be sure to tell her that I'm there. I don't want to put any pressure on Mirnel.]”

It's not about the pressure, but I think it would be even more unpleasant if she came and suddenly said she didn't want to join after seeing me.

Usually, people don't cancel what they said at first, so they have no choice but to join, but that elf is different.

She's a my-pace crazy woman who will leave if she wants to, so it's better to say it in advance.

“It's Aria's request, so it's nothing. Just a moment.”

Fortunately, Evan didn't think it was a big deal and left, saying to wait a moment.

Actually, there's no guarantee that she'll join just because I asked Evan.

There's a good chance that she'll say it's too difficult and won't join as soon as she hears that I'm there. If that happens, I have no choice but to go to Plan B.

I don't like involving Argent, but it's best to defeat it during this Forest of Enticement exam because it's a future disaster that will become even bigger, and we're bringing the Relic of the seal while the seal is not fully released yet.

That was the official route to get a high score in the game.

‘I'm starting to forget…’

I should go back and read what I recorded again.

As I sat down and thought about the things that would happen in the future, I felt someone approaching.

Of course, it was Evan who had left earlier, and…

‘Already?’

He already brought Mirnel?

He even brought her?

“I brought her.”

“[Eh…]”

No way, he actually brought her?

“[Are you joining…?]”

“Yeah. She accepted without hesitation when I said we should form a team and take the exam together.”

Evan answered as if he was also surprised.

He was even shocked by the fact that she didn't refuse even after he told her that I was there, but instead, she said that she would take the exam as a team and even tried to come in herself.

Meanwhile, I had a question.

‘If that's the case, then why…’

If she was going to join the team right away, then why didn't she try to talk to me and kept trying to stay away from me?

I wanted to ask Mirnel right away, but I decided to stay still because it would be annoying if she changed her mind again.

Anyway, I can't understand what elves are doing…

…

Wait a minute,

‘Isn't this the kind of thought that dwarves usually have…?’

Has my race become a dwarf at some point?

It's amazing that she's making me think like this after living as a Saintess for over three years.

I'm going to get elf-phobia.

Of course, I know that such behavior is only limited to Mirnel and that most elves are not like that, but since the first elf I met keeps acting like that to me, I can't help but feel disgusted.

I'm going crazy.

I sighed inwardly and decided to be thankful that she had joined the team.

3 - Exam Preparation

The test this time is to survive in the Forest of Enticement.

To be exact, it's about bringing back a target.

Necklaces are placed on small altars throughout the vast forest, and bringing one back earns you basic points.

Dealing with plants or monsters earns you additional points depending on the monster's level.

To get credit for dealing with a monster, you need to bring back a specific body part as proof.

These are the basic test elements... but in reality, there's much more hidden.

My goal is to bring back a Relic, defeat monsters, and come out in first place.

Anyway, with Mirnel on the same team, all that's left is to practice as much as possible to execute the plan.

Since I was taught everything about the test from beginning to end, it's only natural to practice the plan for how to act during the test.

No, if you make a plan and don't practice it, how can you execute it when the situation arises?

So, it's unavoidable, but...

The Forest of Enticement is called a dungeon, but it's essentially just a normal forest with slightly higher-level monsters than the forests around the academy... or so the setting goes, but with insect-eating plants that devour any living creature, I don't think it's a normal forest.

Anyway, they've blocked off the deep interior of the forest with a Barrier, but they've opened up the entrance area for practice, so it's perfect for a test to gauge the students' abilities.

But... there was one problem.

'I don't seem to be doing anything...'

When we're actually exploring the dungeon, I don't have anything to do.

Of course, it's not like I'm doing absolutely nothing.

You could even say I'm playing the most important role.

Not only am I providing support, but I'm also using Divine Power Detection to sense everything that would normally be invisible in the deep, dark forest and guide the way.

But that's the problem.

I can't fight, and there's no one here who needs my support.

Of course, giving buffs is something I'll do to get more points, even if it's not essential, but unlike healing, which involves sacrificing myself, buffs are just about using my Holy Power to make someone stronger...

The problem is that I don't feel like I'm doing anything significant.

Huh? You might say it's good to be a freeloader if you don't have to do anything for anyone.

Normally, that would be true, since only workaholics would want to work that hard if they weren't directly healing someone...

But the situation is a bit different now.

'I'm thinking about how to get that elf's attention...'

Yes.

It's because of that elf.

What will that elf think if I do nothing but give buffs and don't heal anyone while exploring the dungeon?

I don't know what she's really thinking, so I can't be sure, but maybe she only considers the Saintess who sacrificed herself and succeeded in sealing the Demon King to be a true Saintess, and she doesn't think of me as one.

It's not an impossible idea... and more than anything, I can't find any other reason for her to ignore me, so that's the only way I can think about it right now.

If I were fighting demons, I could do anything because everything I do would be a critical hit to them, but now I'm just putting up shields or giving buffs, so it might seem like I'm not doing anything.

'Would she change her mind if she saw me healing someone who was seriously injured?'

That's a chilling thought that I might have entertained in the past.

But I don't want to do that anymore.

If I really have to, I'll have to beg on my knees.

But I hope that doesn't happen.

"This is the Forest of Enticement..."

I heard Evan swallow hard.

Mirnel had an indifferent expression, Stella looked uninterested, and Uriel was looking around with a curious gaze.

I'm sure that curious gaze will change in an instant.

At first, they're impressed by the scenery of the forest, but most people quickly abandon that thought as they go deeper.

"Ugh."

"Eek?!"

Uriel, who had been looking around curiously, tried to scream when a plant appeared, but barely managed to cover her mouth.

Fortunately, Evan, who was walking next to her, stepped forward and sliced the plant.

It was only shocking in appearance, not particularly strong, so it was easily cut down by Evan's sword and fell to the ground.

Uriel, looking down at the plant that had fallen to the ground, shouted at Evan.

"W-what is that...?!"

"...Did you not listen to any of the things we talked about regarding this test?"

Stella asked, looking incredulous at Uriel's complete lack of understanding of what was going on.

That's strange...

I thought she would be surprised because there was a scene in the game where she was surprised, but... that's beyond being surprised, she looks like she doesn't know anything at all?

I remember the professor explaining all of this when he talked about the test, so I don't know why she's reacting like she doesn't know anything.

"You really didn't know?"

"Ehehe..."

Smiling like that doesn't change anything...

She must have just slept through the lecture because she didn't want to listen.

It's just like Uriel, who likes moving her body but doesn't like using her brain.

"Hmm... it's just the entrance, but it's best to be careful."

Mirnel said, looking around the vicinity.

"[It's okay. I'll guide the way.]"

Not just the way, but I'll find all the traps too.

Normally, if an ordinary person falls, they'll slowly melt and die in a dangerous place, but most people wear bracelets when they enter, so even if they fall into a trap, the protective Barrier that forms when their body comes into contact with digestive fluids is difficult to break through.

It blocks everything, so you can get out easily, but the magic power inside is limited, so if it gets too dangerous, you'll be Teleportationed out automatically, so as Argent said, there's no need to worry about dying in this test.

That's how I made it.

As planned from the beginning, Mirnel is responsible for the rear, Evan for the front, Stella and Uriel for the sides, and I'm protected in the center, using Divine Power Detection to find the path, traps, and enemies to defeat the boss of the forest.

Since it's been used as a test site for a long time, there's a dungeon somewhere in the forest with a student boss that Argent created.

If you go in there, defeat the boss, and come out, first place is practically guaranteed.

Of course, these are all hidden things, so unless you stumble upon them or hear about them from seniors, there's no way to know.

In other words, it's a hidden element for earning points.

There are a lot of hidden things in this test.

The reason we're walking around inside now is partly to get used to the path, but the main reason is to find the path to go in and catch that monster.

'The path itself isn't that different from the game...'

Unlike the game, where the map is limited, this is a vast forest, so I was worried that it would be difficult to find, but thankfully that's not the case.

'That's a relief...'

I was worried that it would be difficult to guide the way, but since they've completely entrusted me with finding the path, I don't have to worry about that.

Stella probably knows most of the information about this test, so if I just throw out bait like discovering a mysterious ruin, she'll take the bait.

If we go to find the ruins right now, she'll definitely wonder what it is and investigate.

And if Stella finds out that it's a hidden boss for earning points and tells us, then we'll go to catch it, that's the basic framework.

The ultimate goal is to go inside and defeat that Magic beast that hasn't fully recovered its power yet.

'Okay... let's do it.'

Mirnel will follow, so it's definitely possible.

I need to see with my own eyes how good the Divine Archer is this time.

...

No, not with my own eyes, but with Divine Power Detection.

Exam Preparation (Intermission)

Since everyone except me didn't really know much about the dungeon, they followed my lead without much suspicion.

Even Mirnel, who had been a scout in the Hero party, wouldn't realize or question if I led them to a strange place, as long as they didn't know the geography of this place well.

Leading them to where I wanted was a piece of cake.

But that only works the first time. If we were going along the usual path and I suddenly took them down a strange road under the guise of leading them to a dungeon, they would definitely find it odd. That's why I was trying to make it seem like we discovered the dungeon from the start.

Fortunately, the dungeon that led into the deep ruins where we could hunt monsters was located at the beginning, so they didn't find it strange that the path changed.

'Even I can't memorize all the paths...'

The real Forest of Enticement and the Forest of Enticement in the game differ in size.

The paths that existed on the original map are the same, but there's no way I could remember all of them.

If it were when I had just Teleportation here from the game, I would have remembered everything, but now, three years have passed since that day, and so many things have happened here that the events in the game have faded in comparison.

There are still some things I can't remember, so I have to go back and look at the things I recorded when I first came to this world.

Human memory isn't perfect.

I'm trying to match this area with the map in the game as much as possible in my head, recalling memories that are deeply buried, and barely walking forward.

As I explored the area, I thought it was about time and opened my mouth.

"[...Everyone, I think I've found a strange place.]"

"A strange place?"

"What is it?"

Stella and Evan, hearing me say that I had found a strange place, approached me and asked what was going on.

I said that we would have to go and see for ourselves to know for sure, and naturally led everyone to the place.

Everyone who arrived at the entrance of the dungeon said with bewildered expressions.

"It looks... really old?"

"It looks like it's going to collapse if we go in..."

Evan nodded in agreement with Stella's words.

To the average person, it looked like a building that was so old it would collapse at any moment, but Mirnel, who always researched such information beforehand, seemed to be taking the bait.

"This is... it seems Argent, no, the Headmaster, made this dungeon."

"A dungeon?"

"Ah! Could it be that one?"

Evan asked what dungeon I was talking about, and Stella reacted as if she knew what this place was.

They completely took the bait.

"During the explanation, I heard that there are dungeons all over the forest, and if you go in there and defeat the boss, you'll get a score that's practically guaranteed to get you first place."

"Well, they said that you'd pass as long as you came out alive without the magic tool activating, but if we're going to go in, it's better to get first place and leave. And..."

Mirnel turned to Evan.

She didn't say anything, but I could tell what she was thinking.

'She's probably thinking that this might be an opportunity to gauge Evan's level.'

She must be curious about Evan's level, even though she's heard about it, because she's only heard stories and hasn't seen it with her own eyes.

And she seems to think that she'll be able to confirm Evan's level by going into the dungeon this time.

'That's a relief.'

I was most worried that Mirnel might be suspicious, but she dispelled my worries without a second thought.

"[Then shall we come here for the exam? It seems like everyone wants to get a lot of points...]"

How many people in the academy would dislike getting points?

Everyone nodded in agreement.

"Ugh... I hope there aren't any plants like that inside...?"

Uriel shuddered as if she really hated the carnivorous plants.

It's one thing to dislike them, but she seems to be more than just disliking them, she's terrified of them. I think there was a story scene in the game where she felt disgusted, but I don't remember it being this bad.

'But it's kind of cute.'

Seeing Uriel, who is usually energetic, cheerful, and the mood maker of our group, trembling with such a terrified expression is a new feeling.

I couldn't help but laugh when she said, "Surely there aren't any monsters like that in the dungeon."

I started laughing, and everyone else started laughing as if they were enjoying the situation.

The only ones who didn't understand why we were laughing were Uriel, the subject of the laughter, and Mirnel.

From then until the day of the exam, we came to the dungeon about three times a week to practice.

Honestly, I didn't think we needed to practice this much, but I thought it would be good to practice as much as possible if we were going to practice anyway.

We needed to earn a lot of points, but it would also be good to become more familiar with the paths here, and it was important to get Uriel, who wasn't used to carnivorous plants, used to them.

After coming three times a week and being forced to see them, she no longer reacted much to the appearance of the plants or the act of cutting them down.

'Should I say she's used to it...'

I don't know if I should say she's used to it, because she still seems to flinch every time she cuts down a plant. She seems to know that she needs to get used to it, so she's trying, but I feel sorry for her every time I see that.

'I'd probably feel a little dizzy if I saw it in person...'

I can see them from afar with Divine Power Detection, and I don't have to face their disgusting visuals directly, so that's why. But just looking at how they look, I can see why Uriel reacts like that.

If I didn't have Divine Power Detection, I might have reacted like Uriel.

Of course, that's not going to happen, so it's a meaningless assumption.

Anyway...

'Everyone's walking around like it's their own home now.'

I thought they wouldn't know the way unless I told them, but now they're walking around on their own without me telling them.

It's definitely convenient that I don't have to tell them the way, but it feels strange because they're walking around fine without my help and cutting down plant monsters just fine, so it feels like I'm not doing anything at all.

'I think this is enough.'

Actually, they seemed to want to go into the dungeon before the exam started, but they couldn't rashly do so because they might not be recognized as having cleared the dungeon.

"Let's stop here for today. The exam is coming up soon, so everyone prepare well."

Everyone nodded at Evan's words.

Everyone was nervous about the dungeon, but on the other hand, they had already fought and subjugated high-ranking demons, so they didn't think they would be fazed by a boss monster in a mere exam.

That's true.

A normal boss is so weak that Uriel alone could beat it.

From the start, Uriel has more power than other ordinary students.

However, the owner of the dungeon we're going to enter... to be precise, the area where that monster is sealed is different.

Moreover, unlike dungeons where other mobs appear, no mobs appear in the dungeon where that monster is sealed.

If mobs appeared, they would feel the strangeness of the level of strength and run away, but everyone will face that monster without even having a moment to feel anything strange.

But that doesn't mean you should try to run away.

'We have to win.'

If we can overcome our fear and defeat that monster, everyone will be able to grow one step further.

Well, not that they're the kind of people who would do that.

Above all...

'Mirnel is there in case of an emergency.'

Thanks to Mirnel's presence, it's a fight we can definitely win.

Even if it's still difficult, there's a way to call Argent, so we can fight to our heart's content without worrying.

I'll thoroughly prevent anything from happening.

"[Shall we go back then?]"

"A dungeon... I'm looking forward to it."

"Honestly, it feels like cheating with our level."

In fact, everyone was worried about whether it would be okay with their level, but on the other hand, they were worried about other things.

That's enough.

1 - The Wolf That Devours God

“Hoo…”

In the dark room, the girl lying on the bed sighed as she rose.

“Tough…”

Mirnel Halberd, an elf girl with light green hair and long ears, looked at the mirror with a pitiful expression.

“I haven’t been able to sleep properly since I came back.”

She had to sleep, but even if she wanted to, she couldn’t.

Mirnel turned her head and looked down at the ring on her finger.

She fiddled with the ring, which had a unique, colorless magic stone embedded in it, then clenched it tightly in one hand and sighed deeply once more.

“You don’t remember?”

She had thought that maybe he would remember along with her.

But no matter how close she got, he showed no signs of remembering, and now she wondered if she should just give up.

Was it this painful to be the only one who remembered things that no one else did?

“Haa…”

Mirnel was going crazy.

Especially when the Saintess kept appearing before her, the memories of that time resurfaced, making it difficult even to talk to her.

Even though she knew that such a thing should not happen this time, whenever she saw the Saintess, that face from then came to mind, and she couldn't do anything but ignore her.

'What should I do…'

Mirnel rubbed her eyes with both hands, sighed, and got up.

In any case, what she had to do hadn't changed.

"Then shall we go?"

Today was the day of the test.

It wasn't particularly difficult, so she should finish it quickly and return.

"[It's today…]"

I'm so nervous.

Well, it's not just any day, but the only chance to get the last Relic, and we're going to catch a Magic beast that's practically one of the executives, so it would be weirder if I wasn't nervous.

'Hoo…'

Maleficent and the Magic beast of the End each had their own unique skills.

For example, Maleficent was a great mage, and the Magic beast of the End had the power to freeze everything and an overwhelming Magic beast army.

Maleficent could be dealt with because Argent, who was also a great mage, was there, and I succeeded in subduing the Magic beast of the End by taking the bold method of being eaten directly into its body and then neutralizing it, otherwise it would have been very difficult.

So, what am I trying to say?

What I want to say is that until now, each of them was a raid with its own gimmicks.

But the Magic beast we're going to catch this time is a little different.

'Overwhelming physical ability…'

It has what you can literally call overwhelming physical ability.

You might not understand why I'm suddenly talking about physical ability, but if you think of it in terms of a game, it's just a character with insanely high stats.

Overwhelming strength, and claws that can fully add that strength to its lethality.

'Fenrir…'

Its epithet is even 'The Wolf that Devours Gods.'

Having your whole body torn apart by its claws is commonplace, and being eaten is also frequent.

'So, I'm looking forward to it…'

What would happen if I got eaten?

If it has the epithet 'The Wolf that Devours Gods,' shouldn't I be excited about what would happen if I got eaten?

In the case of the Magic beast of the End, its digestive system was normal, so even if I got eaten, it only smelled bad and wasn't very pleasant, but maybe that Magic beast will be different.

Of course…

'I can't get eaten…'

It’s a shame, but getting eaten for that reason wasn’t a good idea.

If I actually got eaten and something happened that weakened me, I would be fighting with my existence erased, and if that happened, it would be impossible to save anyone who died unless they were subjugated without me.

The good thing is that Mirnel is here, so it’s not that difficult.

Still, it’s true that it’s something to be nervous about, so I can’t help but feel nervous.

However, unlike me, who knows that we’re going to catch that powerful Magic beast, the others don’t know that, so they don’t seem to be nervous.

Of course, for them, this test wasn’t a difficult task.

In the first place, just because they decided to enter the dungeon doesn’t mean that the dungeon was created to be too much for them.

If that were the case, even if others besides them discovered the dungeon, no one would be able to clear it the moment they entered.

“[Do your best, everyone.]”

Anyway, let’s give it a try.

.

.

.

In front of the test site.

I was standing in place in front of a giant magic circle, facing the professor.

“Well, we’ll start the test soon… Does anyone have anything to say before we begin?”

If I activate that magic circle, I'll fall right into the entrance of the forest.

In the game, there was a fixed spawn point, so it wasn't like you could get lost, but this isn't a game, it's reality.

If I Teleportation through the magic circle, I don't know where I'll fall.

But…

'If I have Divine Power Detection, finding my way is easy.'

Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, I have Divine Power Detection, so it's not difficult for me to find my way even if I'm Teleportation to a random place.

After all, finding the way is entirely up to me.

Anyway, no one answered the professor's question about whether they had anything to say.

The professor looked around at the students for a moment and then activated the magic circle, saying that he would start the test now.

All the students were already wearing bracelets with magic applied to them, so there was nothing to worry about.

Eventually, the magic was fully activated, and just as the light spread out, all the students disappeared from their places.

"This is… the Forest of Enticement."

We were Teleportation together in our assigned teams, so we fell to the same place.

There was no need to meet up with the kids who were assigned to the same team, but from now on, we have to walk into this vast forest and bring back the item to pass the test.

That's how it would normally be, but…

“Shall we go then? Do you know where it is, Aria?”

“[I’ve memorized the way well enough. I won’t have any trouble finding it.]”

In reality, far from not being able to find the way, I could tell where we were even though we had clearly fallen randomly.

At this point, it would be strange if I couldn’t find it.

“[Follow me, everyone.]”

I gestured to everyone and started walking.

It’s in the entrance area anyway, so it’s not that far from here.

Most dungeons are built in the middle or deep inside, which is in contrast to this one, so it’s not impossible that others will find it before us, but…

‘How would anyone find this unless they’re a special case like me?’

In the first place, the entrance to the dungeon is narrow, and it’s not easy to find, so who would think that it would be in the entrance area?

I can find it because I’m looking around with Divine Power Detection, but if it wasn’t for me, I probably wouldn’t be able to find it forever.

When you look at it this way, Divine Power Detection is secretly a scam.

It’s harder to recognize than just looking around with your eyes, but you can see places that you can’t normally see, and unlike seeing through your field of vision, you can see 360 degrees, so there are no blind spots.

I can’t see the beautiful world as it is, but if I only consider efficiency, there’s nothing like Divine Power Detection.

That’s only if I consider efficiency, though.

Anyway, after talking about this and that and walking for a while, the dungeon was right in front of us before we knew it.

“[We’re almost there, everyone.]”

Everyone is probably thinking that they can just clear the dungeon and go back.

First of all, it might feel strange to say that I don’t know when we arrive inside, so it would be better to say that something is wrong as soon as we enter.

‘I feel bad because it feels like I’m driving them to their deaths…’

I wouldn’t have thought this way in the past, but is it because I’ve grown fond of them after spending so much time together?

On the one hand, I’m taking them to the Magic beast, but on the other hand, I wonder if I really have to do this.

But well… I have to do it to subjugate the Demon King, there’s no other way.

If I don’t, it will be much harder to subjugate the Demon King, so even if I feel a little frustrated and guilty now, I can just apologize to everyone after subjugating the Demon King, right?

I turned to look at Evan for a moment.

And then I thought.

I don’t know what will happen to me when that time comes, but I must apologize.

2 - The Wolf That Devours God

"So this is the dungeon…"

"I've been here a lot, but I feel strangely nervous now that I'm actually about to go in."

Everyone nodded in agreement with Stella's words.

We'd been here many times before, but this was the first time we were actually entering. Even though I already knew what kind of dungeon this was, I couldn't help but feel nervous.

Well, it's just nervousness about how far we can go, not fear.

It wasn't just me who wasn't afraid; most of us were the same.

There's nothing particularly dangerous even if we go in, so it's understandable to be nervous, but it would be strange to be afraid…

'Hoo...'

More than nervousness, I couldn't help but worry about whether we could do well.

Subjugating Magic beasts sounds easy, but the ground could collapse if we're not careful.

Argen Headmaster seems to be having a hard time with all the incidents happening at the academy lately. How will he react if he finds out that a very strong Magic beast is living under the place he chose as the test site?

He's managed to hold on so far with his reputation as a great mage, but this time, we really don't know what might happen, so it's important to prevent anything from happening as much as possible.

Argen Headmaster probably hopes that nothing will happen either.

'For Argen Headmaster's sake, it's best to prevent such things from happening again.'

He's already busy with so many things; I can't let him suffer from another boss popping up later.

Actually, aside from that reason, it's also largely to obtain the last Relic.

If not this time, when this guy revives, the Forest of Enticement's ground, as well as the entire dungeon, will collapse, and the chance to find the Relic itself will disappear.

If the dungeon itself collapses, the Relic that was sealing the Magic beast will also be buried in the collapsing dungeon, so how could we find it?

Unless we know the exact location and dig it up, it's impossible.

From the start, pinpointing the exact location of the Relic is almost impossible, so finding it later is even more ridiculous…

So, even in the worst-case scenario where we fail to subjugate the Magic beast, the goal is to at least bring back the Relic of sealing.

Mirnel is here, so it should be possible.

"[...Shall we go in?]"

Everyone nodded at my words.

There's no need to go anywhere else; we just need to go into this dungeon, deal with the boss, and come out, so there's nothing particularly complicated.

I also swallowed hard and stepped inside.

"It feels… eerie."

"Is this really a dungeon that Argen Headmaster made…?"

Uriel said with a doubtful voice, but no one seemed to find it strange.

It's understandable because who else but Argen Headmaster would create a dungeon in a place like this?

Even if Argen Headmaster didn't make it, if that were the case, they would have dismantled this structure before they came here.

Everyone knew it was nonsense, but it was on a completely different level from the typical dungeon they had imagined.

As we all walked inside, we could feel the air changing instantly.

"I have a… bad feeling…"

Evan said, sweating.

As if sensing something, Evan seemed to be about to say that going any further inside wasn't a good idea, but I knew that even in the game, once you entered here, it was impossible to escape unless you subjugated the Magic beast.

I thought that was just a game mechanic and wouldn't be the case in reality…

'The front…'

Something's wrong.

I could feel that Divine Power Detection wasn't working properly.

Evan said that we should go back and tell Argen Headmaster about this dungeon first, but when we followed Evan's words and went towards the entrance, the path we had come through was already blocked.

No, beyond being blocked, the path back itself had changed strangely.

"The path… has changed…"

Evan, having confirmed that the path had completely changed, turned to me and asked.

"Aria… can you find the way back with Divine Power Detection?"

"[...]"

No.

It's not a lie; I think we're in real trouble.

"[I'm sorry… I can't see the path…]"

Until just a moment ago, it wasn't perfectly clear, but I could still see something. However, as the Demonic energy around us gradually intensified, it was as if some unknown force was blocking me, and I couldn't see anything at all.

No, beyond that, I was blocked by an overwhelmingly powerful force, and I couldn't even use Divine Power Detection even if I wanted to.

Thankfully, I could still hear Thought-forms, so there was no problem hearing what the others were saying, but the power to spread Divine Power around and sense the surroundings through it was completely blocked.

'This… I didn't expect this…?!'

Or maybe it's only natural.

In the case of the Magic beast of the end, a very wide area was covered in Demonic energy, so it wasn't a big problem to look around.

But this place is a completely enclosed area.

In a sealed dungeon, Demonic energy has been accumulating for hundreds of years, so it's impossible to look around with the shallow Divine Power used for sensing the surroundings.

You might say that we could just increase the level of Divine Power, but unfortunately, that would make Divine Power Detection itself impossible.

It meant that we were in a situation where we couldn't do either.

"[I can't see ahead… Ah…!]"

I was just following what seemed to be the direction we were walking in when I stepped on an uneven spot and fell forward.

Thud.

"Are you okay, Aria?"

Fortunately, Evan caught me, probably because he thought I might fall.

But at this rate, I can barely follow the direction… I might have become completely useless.

"I'll support you."

I smiled slightly at Evan's words and nodded.

If Evan is supporting me, there won't be any problems for now…

'I didn't realize that not being able to see would be such a big deal…'

An ordinary human would have a hard time even walking around in a place with dense Demonic energy, but Stella, Uriel, Evan, and Mirnel have each reached a certain level of mastery.

Even Mirnel, who was once called the Divine Archer, possesses such powerful strength that this level of Demonic energy wouldn't cause any problems for their bodies.

Originally, the same would be true for me, but this isn't a personal problem with Divine Power Detection; it can be seen as a problem with the surrounding environment.

'If Demonic energy fills a sealed space… I can't see…'

It seems that it has to be a certain level of powerful Demonic energy for that to happen.

I'm learning good information.

Aside from that, we have to subjugate the Magic beast, but if I can't see, there's really nothing I can do…

"For now… we have to follow the path, right?"

"Normally, we would have left the pathfinding to Aria, but it seems difficult now."

"If it really doesn't work out, we can return through the bracelet, so there's no need to worry for now."

I nodded as if Mirnel's words made sense.

As they said, in a normal situation, if something were to happen, we could return through the bracelet, so there's no need to worry, but…

'If my Divine Power is blocked, the bracelet won't work…'

The path is straight, and no monsters appear.

We won't be using the bracelet until we meet the boss monster.

"[Everyone… be careful… I can feel Demonic energy that even makes me tremble…]"

We really have to be careful.

When I explained that I felt an unknown ominousness and tremendous Demonic energy, everyone swallowed hard, looking tense.

Evan had probably already guessed, but when I confirmed it, he replied with a serious Thought-form, saying that he thought so too.

There's nothing I can do right now, so I should focus on giving buffs…

'Fenrir… that guy will definitely try to devour me…'

As the name "Wolf that devours gods" suggests, there's a pattern of him trying to devour those with Divine Power.

I have to try my best not to be eaten, but if I am eaten…

'Relic… I'll have to use it then…'

If I can just obtain the last Relic, the Three Divine Artifacts will be complete.

When that time comes, even if I'm eaten by Fenrir, I'll be able to operate Divine Power from the inside.

If it really doesn't work out, I'll have no choice but to use the Divine Power of the Relics that I've worked so hard to collect in that way once again.

I clenched the Relic tightly and vowed inwardly.

3 - The Wolf That Swallows the God

Walking through the dungeon, I can't help but feel a certain eeriness from the Demonic energy.

I've been in places filled with Demonic energy before, but I was usually too busy to really feel it like this.

'It's kind of funny that I'm even thinking about feeling Demonic energy with my whole body...'

A Saintess is supposed to find Demonic energy ominous and hate it, but I actually enjoy being exposed to it. If a past Saintess saw me, wouldn't they be shocked at how I could be like this?

Of course, I'm not outwardly showing that I like it, but rather that I find it ominous...

In the first place, it's so dark here because of the dense Demonic energy that I can't see anything.

"[...Thank you.]"

"I'll protect you no matter what happens."

Is it because of the anomaly?

I can feel that the Thought-form coming from Evan is very stiff.

If Evan is this anxious, it seems he thinks the situation is very bad. It's probably because I can't see anything, and the Demonic energy is so dense that I can feel it directly on my skin.

If it weren't for me, Stella and Uriel would have suffered significant deterioration in this Demonic energy.

"[Are you two... alright?]"

"Yeah, uh-huh... I think it's thanks to the thin Barrier Aria put up."

I nodded, relieved at Stella's words.

In fact, putting up such a thin Holy Power Barrier was half a gamble.

With my Holy Power, I can block most Demonic energy, but the opponent is a huge Magic beast with the nickname "Demon King's pet," and this is a strong Magic beast sealed here, so this level of Barrier might not be enough.

'I can't tell what's going on around me, so I can only judge by Thought-form...'

I couldn't hear anything to begin with.

The only way I can perceive my surroundings is through Divine Power Detection, which allows me to check 360 degrees, and I've already figured out anything that might make a sound with Divine Power Detection.

But now I can't even use Divine Power Detection, so I can only perceive my surroundings with Thought-form, and unfortunately, I can only perceive what Evan, Mirnel, Stella, and Uriel are saying.

At this rate, there's no way to know what's going on around me.

'Divine Power Detection... it really was important...'

I knew it all along, but it's even more serious now that I can't see anything around me.

It's not like there's no way at all.

If I spread strong Holy Power enough to penetrate this thick Demonic energy, it wouldn't be impossible to look around...

'Not now.'

It seemed better not to use it until I started fighting.

Until then, I'll have to rely on Evan to move around, even though I feel sorry for him.

And...

'Just in case, I should give them a warning soon.'

Now is the perfect time to give a warning.

I sent a Thought-form to everyone.

"[Very dense Demonic energy is flowing out from inside. It would be good to be careful from now on.]"

Everyone tensed up at my words.

In fact, if we go a little further inside, we'll reach the section where the boss monster appears.

Anyway, we really need to be careful from here on out.

"What on earth is inside that..."

Evan said with a tense expression at my words.

If I'm saying this much, it means there's something really unusual inside, so it's only natural that he's so nervous.

Mirnel, Stella, and even Uriel swallowed hard and looked up at the huge door that was presumed to be the last room.

"It seems like there's something in this room..."

Stella, who was looking up at the door and tapping it, raised her hand and concentrated her Magic power.

"I'll check what's inside."

A huge amount of Magic power seemed to flow from Stella's hand and went into the wall.

A moment later,

Rumble!

"Wh, what?!"

"The dungeon... is shaking...!"

Perhaps because it started shaking as soon as she put her Magic power in, Stella was expressing her doubts with a look full of embarrassment.

It's possible that Fenrir woke up because of Stella's Magic power, but even if it wasn't Stella, he would have felt our presence and attacked us a long time ago, so it didn't really matter.

Anyway, the fact that the dungeon started shaking greatly was true, so it seemed like it would be good to get away for now...

'...!!'

"[Do, duck everyone!]"

Everyone reflexively ducked at my words.

At the same time, I heard a sound like something cutting through the air, and then the floor vibrated greatly as if something huge had fallen to the ground with a thud.

"Wh, what's going on...?!"

"Th, the door..."

"The door was cut off...?!"

I heard it was a very big door, but it was cut off...?!

'The stats were incredibly high in the game, but I didn't think it would be this much...'

But in the game, it didn't show him breaking through walls or smashing huge doors.

I guess it's a limitation of the game, but the damage you take when you get hit is unbelievable, so I said that you have to avoid patterns and attack with physical skills, right?

'Well, if those stats are applied to reality as they are, this is natural...!'

Maybe this is even with reduced power.

If he used all of his stats to run wild, it would be natural for even a wide underground space to collapse, because the stats themselves were unbelievable.

'Wait... can we even win this...?'

In the case of the End of the World Magic beast, the power was commensurate with its size, but it was only a huge Magic beast, so the moving speed and swinging speed weren't that fast, so fighting wasn't that difficult.

But now it was different.

The size itself is only a few meters at most, not tens of meters, but the speed, destructive power, and strength are incomparable.

Of course.

He poured all the Demonic energy he had into his overwhelming physical abilities, so it would be strange if he wasn't strong.

Bang!

"Ugh... Stella, take Aria for a second!"

"Wa, wait Evan!"

'Ah...!'

I can see.

As the dense Demonic energy dissipated due to Evan swinging the Holy Sword with Holy Power, Divine Power Detection began to work little by little.

'I'll just have to use it.'

I took out the Relic I had brought.

The Relic of Solanis, the Sun God.

I took it out and gathered the Holy Power I had, including the Holy Power stored inside, and spread it around.

Since it's the room where the boss is, it was good to spread it here to look around.

As I consumed Holy Power and spread it around, I could finally see my surroundings clearly.

And,

"...?!"

A huge wolf the size of an ogre was charging towards us.

Evan shot out like a bullet and swung his sword, but Evan looked embarrassed as the wolf easily caught the sword in its teeth.

"H, he caught it...?!"

- Oww! That hurts! It hurts!

Dense Demonic energy flowed from Fenrir's teeth, and Estel screamed, perhaps because she was bitten by strong teeth.

"E, Estel!"

- I, I'm okay, so give me more Magic power!

As Evan poured Magic power into her, it was converted into Holy Power and tried to eat away at the Demonic energy, and Fenrir jumped back in surprise.

"Now."

Mirnel, who had already taken out her bow, created arrows of light and fired several shots at an incredible speed.

However...

"He, he dodged that...?!"

As if stepping on the air, he kicked off the air and jumped up, easily dodging the arrows that went in several directions, and then landed back on the ground far away.

"F, fast...!"

As Evan said, he was showing incredible speed, but I know.

That's also a lot weaker than it should be.

'The Relic of the Barrier...!'

The jewel embedded in his head.

I could tell at once that the jewel was the Relic of the Barrier.

"[Now is your chance everyone...! That Magic beast is weakened!]"

No matter how you look at it, now that he's weakened by the Relic of the Barrier, it's a great opportunity to catch him easily.

Maybe I can catch that Magic beast much easier than I thought, with almost no damage.

Thinking that, I gave a satisfied smile and gave them buffs.

'Let's fight once.'

It's a fight worth trying...!

4 - The Wolf That Swallows the God

Fenrir glared at us, moving in a circle.

Evan and Uriel, who were at the forefront of the fight, also moved together, drawing a circle.

'Even weakened, it has this much power... is it insane?'

Even with the Earth Barrier Stone, a Relic of the Barrier, embedded in its head, it possessed claws and strength that could create wind pressure capable of blowing away this massive door.

It was fine for Evan, who could directly engage in melee combat, but with Fenrir's level of power, Uriel could easily die, so I had to be careful.

But…

'Why is she so confident…?!'

Rather, she was confidently stepping forward.

Thinking that Uriel might be in danger, I reflexively moved forward to put a shield on her, but Fenrir had already pounced on Uriel, an easier target, long ago.

No matter how strong it was, it was basic to rush in if an opening was presented.

I was flustered by Fenrir's appearance, intending to cut off her breath in one blow and target the next opponent, and I gathered Holy Power to stop it somehow…

At that moment.

Krrrk?!

Fenrir was momentarily horrified and stopped with its hand raised towards Uriel.

Then, it jumped back and moved far away from Uriel.

Regardless, Uriel still held the huge sword in front of her, not backing down at all.

"Too bad… it would have succeeded if you had come a little closer."

Then, she muttered as if she was truly disappointed.

"W-what was that just now…?"

What had happened?

No one understood.

Fenrir had only tried to rush at Uriel, but for some unknown reason, it couldn't rush in and was trembling in fear behind her.

However, I could tell what Uriel was trying to use just now.

No, there was no way I couldn't know.

'Was she trying to use the special skill in the sword…'

I know that can only be used once.

Well, it's best to use it now when she hasn't grown properly yet.

In the game, Uriel started with a good greatsword from the beginning.

After all, she was a princess of the Empire and the Emperor's beloved daughter, so from the time she grew up as a knight, the Empire gave her a sword that was no different from a treasure.

In other words, it was a national treasure-level greatsword, so it was bound to have special skills.

However, it wasn't rated very well. First, she used a good greatsword, but she couldn't use any other swords besides that one, and unless Uriel awakened and grew, the sword's specs would remain the same.

The special ability was a crazy skill in the setting, but in terms of balance, it was a skill that didn't work on Demon King Army executives or the Demon King, and it only worked on those other than them, so there weren't many places to use it.

If she could switch weapons, she could use a sword of legendary grade or higher from the start, so the evaluation would have been reversed, but since she couldn't switch, giving Uriel a greatsword was like a white elephant.

However, the skill was fraudulent.

A skill that unleashes a sword aura that cuts anything, but only once…

So it's not strange that she tried to use it in this situation.

However, even if a Magic beast like Fenrir was hit by that attack, it wouldn't die immediately unless it hit a vital point, but anyway, its body would be cut…

No matter how tough and strong Fenrir's recovery power was, it would inevitably suffer some damage.

It didn't know what would come out of that greatsword, but it recognized that it was a threatening skill to itself, so it had a really good sense.

"It seems to be afraid of this sword…?"

Uriel, who immediately noticed that it was looking at the sword and backing away, said that, and Evan said to Uriel as if it was an opportunity.

"Yes! With that, you can corner it…!"

Unlike me, who knew the inside story, the situation was that Fenrir's actions were incomprehensible except for Uriel, but it was true that it was afraid of Uriel anyway.

I didn't know what was going on, but if we used this, we might be able to catch Fenrir more easily.

Evan, who thought so, seemed to be asking Uriel to drive Fenrir.

For Fenrir, who was inducing melee combat by moving around quickly, this dungeon was originally virtually its home ground.

If a very fast guy kicked off the walls or ceiling of the underground chamber and rushed at us quickly, attacking us frantically, it would not be easy to respond.

In other words, originally, it was right that we were at a disadvantage, but conversely, if we gradually drove it to the corner through those who could respond… even if we drove it to one corner, it would become a disadvantageous situation for Fenrir.

That's why, for some reason, he was telling Uriel to come forward to drive Fenrir, who was running away in fear, to one side.

"[If you corner Fenrir and make it difficult to run away!]"

Of course, the other side wasn't just going to be hit, and it wouldn't be easy because it could just escape, but just reducing the range of action would make it much easier for Mirnel to predict and hit the arrows, so it wasn't a meaningless act.

I explained it in an easy-to-understand way for Uriel and drew out Holy Power to give her a buff so that she wouldn't get hurt as much as possible.

I gave her a pretty strong buff, so if it was this much, she wouldn't be seriously injured by the wind pressure alone unless she was hit directly.

And…

Whoong! Kwang!

Krrrk?!

Fenrir, who was embarrassed by Uriel's appearance, who not only easily avoided the attack but also launched a counterattack, jumped back, and Mirnel, who aimed for the timing, created arrows of light again and shot several of them in an instant.

'The power is… focused on penetration after all.'

Well, if I had committed the atrocity of blowing everything away, the underground chamber would have collapsed and we would have been buried in the ground together, so that's right.

Fenrir wasn't stupid either, so it was thinking about that much and avoided it easily…

"Hap!"

In the meantime, Evan couldn't just stand still.

Evan also moved quickly according to Fenrir's movements and checked it with the Holy Sword.

For Fenrir, if it dodged to avoid Uriel, Mirnel's arrows would fly, and Evan would jump up and attack from the air where Mirnel's arrows were not free.

Uriel couldn't get close because she was afraid of being attacked, Evan didn't back down in melee combat, and Mirnel was also checking from afar.

Fenrir would probably be frustrated.

'This… is there even anything for me to do…?'

If this continues, I might be able to give it enough damage before going to the next phase and catch it easily.

At that moment,

Kieeeing!

The moment a huge Demonic energy poured out from Fenrir.

Chwaak!

“…?!”

There was no time to react.

When I came to my senses, I felt like my upper body on the right side had been torn off.

"Kuh, ha…"

I was possessed and focused Divine Power Detection behind me.

There was Fenrir, who had moved behind me in an instant and was standing with its claws stuck in the wall, and in its mouth was what used to be my arm, dangling.

Soon, it swallowed it as it was and arched its body as if it was howling.

"Aria!"

"W-what, what was that speed just now?!"

I made a mistake.

I never intended this situation.

Rather, I was trying to work hard with the intention of showing the appearance of a competent Saintess here and getting Mirnel's recognition.

However, because I was trying too hard, I only thought, judged, and planned with the knowledge of the game, so I didn't expect any unexpected situations at all.

The ones I had faced so far were easy, but most of them only had patterns and no specific phases.

But Fenrir was different.

'No way… it's already using phase 2… I didn't know it would take it out right away…'

I had forgotten one thing.

In the game, it gets stronger by taking out new patterns as its health decreases.

Depending on the health, it moves on to the next phase and becomes stronger, showing more diverse patterns.

But that's just a game.

It's just a story that works in those kinds of games that adjust the difficulty through intuitive values called health.

Reality was not like that.

I should have predicted that it could take out hidden power and launch a surprise attack if necessary and acted accordingly.

I thought too much like a game.

I lost my balance with the pleasant sensation flowing in from my right upper body and fell to the floor.

I know I shouldn't be doing this…

'Haa…♡”

After all, it seemed that I couldn't resist my instincts…

5 - The Wolf That Devours God

"What in the world is going on…?!"

Evan turned around and muttered with a bewildered expression.

In an instant, Fenrir seemed to flash, and before he knew it, Aria's body was torn apart. Fenrir stood with his claws dug into the wall, biting into Aria's upper body.

"Aria!!"

"A, arm…!!"

Stella and Uriel screamed, calling Aria's name.

It was only natural that Aria was attacked first.

Even if the Saintess was attacked, she would regenerate anyway, but in the end, the one moving that body was just an ordinary person.

Although she had intelligence, unless they knew about the Saintess's abilities, they seemed to have only recognized that she was just a healer and buffer, so they had to kill her first.

But…

'He ate Aria's body…!!'

Blood poured out of Aria's upper body, which had been torn apart alive, as if a faucet had been turned on.

Aria, who had fallen to the floor, clutched her bleeding right upper body with her opposite hand, groaning.

The situation was not properly understood, but Evan was sure of one thing.

Aria was attacked.

Even though Uriel and he were holding out in front, Fenrir had moved faster than them and succeeded in attacking Aria.

Evan stared at Aria with trembling eyes.

Life was slowly draining from her body.

The black Demonic energy, visible to the eye, was hindering her recovery and causing tremendous pain at the same time.

"Ugh…!"

Uriel stood guard in front of Aria, and Stella, who had approached from behind, cast a shield.

A determination to cut down anyone who came here.

Uriel had the power to cut down Fenrir, who was approaching, but only once.

But even so…

'I… can't react…'

Uriel's legs were trembling.

A speed that she couldn't even react to.

If he attacked again at a speed that she couldn't even see, Uriel had no confidence that she could react, even with her special ability.

She was tormented by the fear that she might become like Aria.

However, Fenrir had no intention of targeting Aria.

As the Demon King's pet who had lived for quite a long time, he naturally had intelligence and knew very well what kind of weapon he possessed.

There was no reason to target Aria, who was already incapacitated.

In addition, he had become even stronger than before by tearing off Aria's arm. In that state, Fenrir's next target was already decided.

Fenrir's gaze shifted.

Even if he was fast enough to move to the very back in an instant, it would be annoying to have an opponent attacking him from afar.

In other words, what Fenrir was aiming for was…

'Mirnel…!!'

"Mirnel! Run away!"

Evan, who immediately judged who Fenrir was trying to target, shouted at Mirnel, but Mirnel was staring blankly at Aria, visibly confused.

No, that's…

'Something… is dangerous…!'

He didn't know what state Mirnel was in right now, but he could tell that she was in danger.

It had happened so quickly that he hadn't noticed it a moment ago, but now he could step forward and block Fenrir faster than Fenrir could attack Mirnel.

He moved faster than Fenrir's attack speed and stood in front of Mirnel.

Immediately after Evan stood in front of Mirnel, Fenrir kicked off the wall and swung his claws at Evan in an instant.

And,

Clang!

"Kuh…!!"

- Owwwww!

Estel's scream was heard.

An enormous power that even the Holy Sword was in pain, of course, even considering that Estel was just exaggerating, it meant that it had that much power.

Even though he was holding the sword, Evan thought that if he had lost his mind even for a moment, he would have dropped the Holy Sword and his body would have been torn apart by those claws.

If Mirnel had been hit by that head-on, she probably wouldn't have been able to exist in one piece and would have been torn to shreds.

Cold sweat ran down his entire body.

Grrr…!

Evan channeled Holy Power into the Holy Sword that was blocking the claws, and Fenrir, who had concealed his claws, jumped back and created distance.

'I barely reacted…'

Even that was just reacting to some extent. He didn't even know exactly which direction it was flying from, so he barely managed to block it by holding the sword out long.

If he had been unlucky, he wouldn't have been able to block it and Mirnel, who was behind him, would have been torn to shreds at the same time.

"S, strong…!"

He hadn't even received a proper buff from Aria, but at this speed, he couldn't react properly.

Evan wondered if he should retreat, but he was reminded that he couldn't even retreat because the door was closed.

'Hold out until Aria recovers…?'

That wouldn't work either.

Evan glanced at Aria.

Stella had already approached and cast a shield to prevent her from being attacked any further, and was anxiously looking around at Aria.

"Oh, what do I do… the recovery is slow…"

Uriel took out a potion with trembling hands and tried to spray it, but it had no effect.

It was only natural.

In the first place, even with the body of the Saintess, which heals quickly from this level of injury, she was not regenerating properly.

Fenrir.

He couldn't have known that he was a monster with the epithet of a wolf that devours gods, and therefore had Demonic energy that was strong against the power of God.

If things continued like this, it would be as good as annihilation.

Even in that situation, Mirnel… was still looking back at the fallen Aria, her eyes shaking violently, without even recognizing or acting on the fact that she was being attacked.

Evan couldn't just stand by and watch, so he gritted his teeth and shouted at Mirnel.

"Please come to your senses! Mirnel!"

“…?!”

Mirnel's eyes widened at Evan's shout.

"I understand that you're worried about Aria. Maybe… it's because of what happened during the Hero party days. I don't know why…"

Evan raised his sword towards Fenrir and said.

"If we don't defeat that monster now, we'll all die! Far from saving Aria… we'll all be eaten alive by that Magic beast!"

Evan's shout.

As if responding to it, the wolf, which had been growling lowly, jumped at Evan once again.

The same speed as before. Fenrir, who wasn't confident in breaking the shield that Stella had set up with all her might, thought it was reasonable to target Evan first, who was the strongest but couldn't block properly and wasn't receiving any backup.

However…

- I can block this much!

Estel, who directly moved the sword path that Evan had extended to block, said so.

She was, after all, the Holy Sword.

If she used Demonic energy converted into Holy Power, she could slightly twist the sword path.

Unlike Evan, whose reaction speed was inevitably slower because he was a living being, the Ego Sword Estel could react sufficiently to Fenrir's attack.

"Estel…!"

It was an attack from Fenrir that he almost failed to block, but he barely managed to block it.

And…

“… Right. I have to come to my senses.”

Mirnel, who had been wearing a blank expression for a moment, muttered as she got up from her seat.

"I'm sorry for showing you such an unsightly appearance in front of my junior, after talking so well…"

"If you know so well, do something…!"

"I understand."

At that moment, Evan felt that Mirnel's atmosphere had changed.

Evan smiled with satisfaction at the sight.

Soon,

"You lowly demon dog. I'll show you the difference in class."

Mirnel, who had taken out her bow, shone her eyes and shot an arrow.

However…

It was different from before.

Just as a light arrow was about to be fired, it split in the air and an enormous number of arrows flew towards Fenrir.

It was as if they had a will of their own and were flying.

Fenrir, who was flustered by this, moved at an enormous speed once again, but the moment he moved, the arrows bent at an impossible angle and flew towards Fenrir, who had moved.

"G, guided arrows…?!"

It wasn't slow either.

It was only slow because the underground chamber was so wide, but the arrows were flying as they were without weakening their power.

Kuaang!

Fenrir, who had stopped moving several times, finally couldn't stand it and swung his claws.

Kwaaaaaa!

With an enormous air pressure, the magic arrows lost their light and disappeared.

Was that all?

At the moment when he was about to be a little disappointed, though he didn't show it,

"Weakness… found it."

Mirnel, who had been quietly looking at Fenrir, said something completely unexpected.

“… Excuse me?”

Evan couldn't help but ask back stupidly at those words.

He couldn't understand what she meant by finding a weakness.

6 - The Wolf That Swallows the God

That monster also has a weakness.

Evan wondered if such a thing existed, but on the other hand, he thought it was possible.

If it could move around at that speed without any problems, why wouldn't it move continuously to target them?

If it kept moving at a speed that they couldn't even react to, it could have annihilated them a long time ago, but for some reason, it was repeating the process of moving once and then resting.

Until just now, he hadn't been able to make proper judgments due to the shocking situation, but now that he thought about it, there were more than one or two strange things.

"... Could it be?!"

Only then did Evan realize what Mirnel's weakness was.

Mirnel nodded at Evan's reaction.

"That Magic beast can only move quickly for a moment. And it rests for a while by digging its claws into the wall."

However, it couldn't be seen as a weakness, as the problem was that it didn't need to rest for that long if you looked at the interval.

There was an interval of about 2-3 seconds, but considering the tremendous speed of movement and its power, that amount of interval was not a big problem.

In addition, as if it knew its weakness well, it was on a high wall where it could dig its claws and look around widely.

In the case of Evan, who usually fights up close, the attack would not reach, and in the case of a long-range attack that inflicts sufficient damage, the interval would have already passed and it would have evaded it, so it was a situation where they could do neither.

In other words, it was difficult to see it as a complete weakness.

But…

"The fact that you mentioned it means there's a reason why it's called a weakness, right?"

"... Yes."

Mirnel nodded at Evan's question.

There is a reason why it can be called a weakness.

That was enough.

It was an urgent situation.

It was too difficult to listen to the explanation right away in this situation, so Evan nodded and asked Mirnel to explain what he should do.

Mirnel's answer to Evan's question was simple.

"Just block the attacks."

Just block the attacks.

"... What?"

What exactly does that mean?

Just as he was about to ask Mirnel, thinking that he had to hear the detailed reason,

"Look ahead!"

Mirnel shouted, seeing Fenrir rushing towards Evan, who had briefly turned his gaze away.

At Mirnel's shout, Evan turned his head again and prepared to defend against Fenrir, who was rushing towards him, by pouring Holy Power into the Holy Sword.

As Estel supplemented the magic power so that Estel could move comfortably and block the attack, Estel moved the sword in the direction Fenrir's claws were flying and blocked it.

Clang!

"Kugh...!!"

However,

Fenrir seemed to have already predicted that the attack would be blocked, and this time it attacked in a different way.

A sharp wind pressure that the sword could not completely block flew and tore Evan's body to pieces.

Swish!

"Ugh..."

However, Evan gritted his teeth and endured it.

Aria had even experienced the pain of having her upper body torn off.

He couldn't bear to be in pain from just having his arms and legs cut by the wind pressure, so he had no face to see Aria.

And…

"Good job!"

Mirnel, who had been preparing an attack, fired an arrow at Fenrir.

Fenrir, who had grasped the attack, tried to escape, but it was already too late.

Thwack!

Kieeng?!

Fenrir, who had not completely avoided the arrow and was pierced by several arrows, let out a painful groan and jumped back greatly...

"You're simple."

Mirnel had already predicted where Fenrir would escape and had been raining arrows from the sky for a long time.

Pshushushushushushushuk!

Countless arrows pierced Fenrir's back.

Grrr...

Fenrir, who was full of arrows like a hedgehog, staggered and let out a painful groan.

"We, we did it...!"

Shouldn't we consider it over at this point?

Evan, who was covered in blood, looked back at Mirnel as if relieved, but...

"No way..."

Mirnel's expression was not good.

"Why, what's wrong?"

"He should have died from that just now. The fact that he's maintaining his strength even with those injuries means..."

It meant that he wasn't going to die from just this.

What the hell is that monster that exists in a place like this?

The arrows of Demonic energy that were stuck in his back disappeared, and the back, which was full of holes, began to heal.

Soon, Fenrir's body began to be enveloped in Demonic energy.

"An ominous energy..."

Evan didn't know what that was right now, but he was sure of one thing.

"It's dangerous...!"

That it was dangerous.

Evan gathered Holy Power into the Holy Sword and stuck it into the ground.

Holy Power flowed along the floor and formed a Barrier to protect everyone.

- This isn't efficient, are you okay?!

Estel asked Evan as if she was really okay, but there was no way right now.

Aria, who was covered in Demonic energy and in pain, couldn't be asked right away, and Evan's intuition was telling him that he had to block that attack even if he used too much power.

Evan grabbed Mirnel and immediately moved to where Stella, Uriel, and Aria were lying down, and then stuck the sword into the ground.

- W, wait a minute, Evan?!

"Estel! Barrier!"

- Wh, what?!

Estel was flustered, but she seemed to have made up her mind from the moment she stuck the Holy Sword into the ground.

"Hurry!"

Estel was hesitating whether to deploy the Barrier or not even at Evan's shout, but...

- Oh, I really can't help it...!!

She judged that everyone here might die if she didn't deploy it, so she pushed the Demonic energy flowing in as Evan said to the floor and formed a Barrier as it was.

Awoooooo!!

Kwaaaaaaa!

After Fenrir's howling, Evan gritted his teeth and tried to endure the huge wave of Demonic energy that was spewing out, but...

"Kueueueuk...!"

Although it was a Holy Power Barrier that was not very efficient, it was difficult to simply withstand the wave?!

Did he have this much power?

Mirnel was also shocked as if she had never thought that the Magic beast would have that much power.

"How can he have this much Demonic energy... He should be a cadre or more with this much...!"

Evan looked around blankly at Mirnel's shocked words.

The Demonic energy was so strong that it was causing waves, and the entire underground space was about to collapse.

Fortunately, the space was built solidly, so it was only cracking, but it was foreshadowing that it wouldn't be long.

Not only that, but

Crack, crack

"Th, the Barrier...!"

Thanks to Evan's power being greatly strengthened compared to before, it was not breaking through immediately, but it was a powerful impact that was cracking the Barrier.

It was because the efficiency of the Barrier was not very good.

In the first place, the Holy Sword was not designed to create a Barrier.

- It's, it's going to break!!

Evan tried to make the Barrier stronger by pouring in more magic power at Estel's scream-like shout, but it was far from enough.

Kuaaaa!

He was already struggling with the storm, but in the meantime, it seemed like he had charged up the power to attack, and Evan could see the dark energy gathering on his claws.

"That's..."

He didn't know what that was, but he was sure of one thing.

The moment he got hit by that, it wasn't an exaggeration, but his whole body might really be torn to pieces... That the attack he was currently

deploying with this Barrier was not an attack that he could block at all.

He had to run away.

His survival instinct was screaming that it was dangerous if he didn't run away right now.

That he would die if he didn't run away... Such thoughts filled his head.

He felt like death was looming close in front of him.

However…

Evan stood still with a venomous expression on his face.

He couldn't run away leaving his loved ones behind.

In the first place, it was a space where he couldn't even run away.

'I'll protect them...!'

He doesn't know if he can block the attack that's flying right now.

No, it's an attack that he's rather convinced that he won't be able to block.

But he had to block it.

How could he grow more here and defeat the Demon King if he couldn't even block an attack of that level?

Even the attack he's seeing right now is an attack that's embarrassing to even compare to the real Demon King, so if he's afraid of such an attack and can't even block it...

That was no different from not being qualified as a Hero.

'I'll definitely block it...!'

Evan glared and waited for Fenrir's attack to fly.

Fenrir, whose eyes were completely red, swung his claws at Evan.

A storm full of black Demonic energy was fired at Evan.

And then,

Kwaaaaaaa!

A huge storm of Demonic energy struck the Barrier.

7 - The Wolf That Swallows God

After the attack subsided,

The thick smoke dissipated, and Evan, who appeared through it, released the hand that had been holding the Holy Sword and exhaled the breath he had been holding in.

"Haa… haa… Wh-what happened…?"

He looked down at the Holy Sword embedded in the floor with trembling eyes, expressing his bewilderment.

As soon as he saw Fenrir preparing to swing at him, he instinctively knew that he wouldn't be able to block it.

The reason he didn't back down was because he knew that if he retreated from here, there would be nowhere else to retreat to.

Evan tried to endure with all his might, thinking he would somehow block it, but Evan himself knew better than anyone that it was beyond his capabilities.

So why was he standing here unscathed?

Evan looked around.

Only the area where he was standing was untouched, as if nothing had happened.

Most of the area, except for Evan and his surroundings, was on the verge of collapse, swept away by the Demonic energy's wave.

And…

"Th-the underground chamber…"

The wall was completely torn apart by claws.

It was a wonder it hadn't collapsed immediately.

Evan swallowed hard.

'If I had been hit by that kind of power…'

He probably would have been swept away without leaving a single bone fragment behind.

Thinking that far, Evan felt goosebumps all over his body.

Fortunately, Fenrir's condition didn't seem too good either, as he seemed to have used up quite a bit of energy in the previous attack.

Of course, it was only to the extent that he had gathered his strength to unleash a single blow, so it seemed certain that he would attack again after a short rest.

Even so, it was hard to imagine a Barrier that could block an attack with such power that it could exhaust such a monster to that extent…

How on earth did they block it?

Cough, cough…

As Evan was lost in thought with such questions, he heard a coughing sound in his ear.

A familiar voice, and…

"[I'm… not too late…]"

A familiar Thought-form's voice.

Evan reflexively turned his head to look in the direction of the Thought-form.

And there…

"[Is everyone… alright?]"

Aria, clutching her still-unhealed arm and gasping for breath, was asking them.

Only then did Evan begin to understand the situation.

Could it be that Aria had blocked the previous attack?

If Aria had stepped in and blocked the attack directly, it wouldn't be so strange that everyone was safe and unharmed.

While relieved that Aria was alright, Evan felt a sense of powerlessness towards himself.

'I couldn't even… react…'

He couldn't even react to the Magic beast's attack.

Even though he had said he would protect them from the previous attack, he was the one who was being protected.

He felt so sorry for Aria.

Evan hung his head low.

"[I'm sorry… If I had been a little more careful, we wouldn't have been attacked like this…]"

Even so, Aria was lamenting that if she had been a little more careful, she wouldn't have become such a burden.

Evan bit his lip.

Even though he had become this strong, it was still not enough?

'Don't be ridiculous…'

Evan tried to calm the seething emotions inside him.

It wasn't just Evan.

Everyone was feeling powerless.

Stella was devastated that she couldn't block it with her magic.

Uriel was tormented by the fact that the power of her weapon was not her own and that it hadn't been of much help.

Mirnel was averting her gaze, not even looking at Aria.

Judging from how she had been out of her mind for a while after seeing Aria get hurt earlier, it was clear that something was bothering her.

Evan clenched his fist tightly.

No matter how angry he was, he couldn't get angry at Aria, who had gathered all her strength to protect them.

After somehow suppressing his seething emotions, Evan reached out his hand to Aria with a seemingly nonchalant expression and said,

"No, it's okay. Can you stand up?"

"[…I'm alright.]"

Aria replied, trying to get up on her own, but she seemed to have a lot of trouble balancing because one of her arms was gone, and she staggered as she tried to stand up.

"Be, be careful."

Stella, who was next to her, grabbed Aria and carefully helped her up.

"[The… fight isn't over yet, everyone…]"

The fight with Fenrir had barely lasted five minutes, and even though it was a severe injury for an ordinary person, Aria's wound, which should have healed a long time ago, was still not healing.

It was probably because of Fenrir's power, which had the power to destroy gods, but since they didn't know what that Magic beast was, except for Aria, there was no way they would know what kind of power it had.

But they could sense the seriousness.

It wasn't just that one of her arms was gone, but Aria's upper body, all the way to her shoulder, had been torn off.

It seemed that even the part where her lungs were had been torn off, and her breathing could barely be heard.

It was a natural result, as her upper body had been completely twisted because she had been forcibly twisted and pulled apart while moving at an incredible speed.

"Hoo… hoo…"

Fortunately, her recovery was progressing, and flesh was gradually growing back, but it was still taking time to fully recover, as it seemed to be a powerful Demonic energy, and she was still panting and groaning in pain.

It was hard to watch with open eyes, but they had gotten somewhat used to it over the time they had spent together, so they could somehow endure it and face it.

'I don't want to get used to this…'

He didn't want to get used to seeing Aria get seriously hurt.

Even now, he wanted to turn away, but he was just enduring it.

Meanwhile,

Aria reached out and touched Evan's arm.

Evan was momentarily taken aback, but a faint Holy Power flowing from Aria's hand began to heal Evan's body.

The wounds that Evan had sustained when he failed to completely block the attack that Fenrir had unleashed after becoming stronger were being healed.

"This is…"

As the wounds disappeared from Evan's body, wounds appeared on Aria's body.

But she wasn't being healed.

Normally, she should have been healed quickly, but now Aria was under attack from Demonic energy, so she was too busy blocking it to be properly healed.

'If she can't be healed by Holy Power because of the Demonic energy… that means it's at least a cadre-level…!!'

Evan bit his lip.

He had been thinking that it was too strong to be a monster he had met in this underground chamber, but if Aria couldn't heal properly, it was at least on par with or above that level.

'Is there a way to call Argen Headmaster…?'

As of now, it was safe to say that there wasn't.

Evan tried to activate the magic tool on his wrist, just in case, but there was no response.

That meant it was impossible for now.

As he was agonizing over the hopeless situation, Aria raised her arm.

"[Evan… there's a place… that you and everyone else must aim for…]"

"A place to aim for…?"

Even while gasping for breath, Aria raised her remaining arm and pointed at Fenrir.

"[If you look closely… at its head… there's a jewel…]"

"A jewel…?"

Evan turned his head and looked at the area around Fenrir's head.

As Aria had said, light was flowing out little by little from the jewel embedded in its head.

"[That's a Relic of the Barrier… I don't know the details, but it was probably used to seal that monster.]"

Come to think of it…

Evan had felt light flowing out of that jewel whenever Fenrir tried to use its power.

At first, he had briefly thought that it was the source of its power, but he couldn't really tell if it was right or not because he didn't feel any ominous energy…

'If what Aria says is true…'

If they could reactivate that Relic, could they seal the Magic beast again?

'No… sealing it is not an option.'

If such a dangerous monster was sealed deep inside the academy's testing grounds, resealing it would be insane.

Evan decided that it would be much better to fight with all their might and subjugate it rather than seal it.

In that case…

"[If you put Holy Power into the Relic, you can definitely weaken Fenrir's power even further. You have to aim for that.]"

"… I understand."

Evan nodded and replied to Aria's explanation.

For now, doing as Aria said was the best option.

Evan raised his sword and met the eyes of Fenrir, who had just finished recovering.

A desperate battle with an overwhelming difference in power.

There was no way to escape from this place.

But they couldn't back down.

Evan gripped the hilt tightly, glared at the jewel embedded in Fenrir's head.

If he could somehow inject only Holy Power into that place, it would be a manageable fight.

The two, who had been staring at each other and quietly gathering their strength, then…

Bang!

Kicked off the ground and charged towards each other.

8 - The Wolf That Devours the God

Inserting Holy Power into a Relic.

In truth, that alone allows the Relic to exert its power.

Simply injecting Demonic energy wouldn't work, but since Evan is the only one here capable of handling Holy Power, there's no other way to infuse Holy Power into the jewel embedded in Fenrir's head except for Evan to step forward himself.

And Evan has to succeed.

Otherwise, they're bound to lose.

It's unfortunate, but…

'Ugh… haa… I'm happy…'

She's too busy enjoying herself.

No, of course, it's not that I'm deliberately refraining from intervening, even though I could, because I want Evan to grow.

It's not that I don't have that intention, but if things go wrong, everyone is in danger of dying, so naturally, I would have stepped in and done something if I could.

As the epithet "Wolf that Devours Gods" suggests, it's a matter of reverse compatibility.

Aggressive Demonic energy devours Holy Power, but conversely, it suffers significant damage when attacked with Holy Power. To put it in game terms, Fenrir has the characteristics of a glass cannon.

In terms of offensive performance alone, it's on par with or even surpasses the Demon King.

Being devoured doesn't mean death, but it means being completely neutralized by Demonic energy.

From the start…

'Regeneration is really not working…'

Even though I was only bitten on the arm, instead of regenerating immediately, so much time has passed and it still hasn't properly regenerated. Doesn't that show how powerful that damn wolf is?

Regeneration isn't something I can control at will.

In other words, I can't regenerate purely because of the power that Fenrir possesses.

Of course, I could focus Holy Power on my arm and make it happen, but it's not like I'll die from losing an arm, and it'll heal on its own if I wait a bit, so there's no point in focusing on intensive care with my power.

More than anything…

'I think I used too much power blocking that attack just now…'

Being bitten by Fenrir, especially with teeth instead of a hand, put me in an even more weakened state. Forcibly drawing up Holy Power to deploy a Barrier consumed too much power.

I was already struggling because of the wound, and that attack was the final blow.

I thought that attack might sweep everyone away, so I drew out as much power as possible to block it. Now, I barely have enough power left to scatter Holy Power to survey the surroundings.

Fortunately, I gave Evan buffs and a shield beforehand, so there's no need to expend Holy Power again now.

I need to conserve as much power as possible so that I can step in and resolve any unexpected situations that may arise.

Well, honestly, I gave Evan buffs and deployed a shield, and he even blocked that attack before entering the third phase, didn't he?

I think I've done all I need to do.

Wouldn't asking for more be shameless…

I think I've done everything a healer can do. If they can't defeat Fenrir after all this, it's as good as not being able to defeat the Demon King.

I took out the Relic from my bosom.

"[Everyone… this…!]"

"This is… a Relic…?"

It's much better for Evan to have it than for me to have it now.

After all, I'm barely managing to heal my own body right now, so nothing will change if I have it.

It would be much more helpful for Evan, who can directly use the Relic, to have it when fighting Fenrir.

"H, how can I…"

"[… Please…]"

"Aria…!"

Stella called out to me, but I was already starting to lose my hearing.

Ah, I'm really losing strength…

'I need to rest a bit…'

Actually, it's not resting, but lying down and enjoying the pain for a while.

You can call me irresponsible, but I can't help it.

It's not like I can do anything by stepping in here, and I've already run out of Holy Power. What can I do?

Since it's come to this, shouldn't I at least feel as good as possible?

"…"

Ah, before that…

I cast a Holy Power shield on Stella and Uriel, who were holding my hand.

Since I have so little power left, I could only create a weak shield, but this much should be enough.

"[It will… block one attack…]"

How much does it matter that it blocks one attack?

The two of them will do well.

More than that…

'There's really not much time left now…'

After giving Uriel and Stella the last Holy Power shield, I really didn't have any Holy Power left to survey the surroundings.

In the pitch-black darkness, using the pain in my arm as a pillar, I completely closed my eyes.

'Ah… comfortable…'

The strong but subtle pain…

The Demonic energy slowly seeping in, yet slowly being healed by the Holy Power coming from my body…

This isn't bad…

I chuckled inwardly and thought so.

"…"

Stella looked down at the unconscious Aria and got up from her seat.

Nothing would change by continuing to look at Aria here.

"S, Stella…"

"I can't just stand by."

I have to do something.

Stella looked down at the Relic in her hand and then looked ahead.

Evan and Fenrir were clashing.

And Mirnel was providing support fire from behind.

"I don't want to do nothing."

Uriel, at least, could see them if she enhanced her body, but as a mage, it was all she could do to keep up with their speed.

But that didn't mean she couldn't do anything.

Passing the Relic of Purification to Evan.

And…

'Inserting Holy Power into Fenrir's head…'

Originally, she would have to attack directly to insert Holy Power, but even Evan was being pushed back in the close combat with Fenrir.

If it's space magic…

Perhaps it's possible to use the magic she possesses.

"With this…!"

Stella clenched the Relic in her hand and brought it to her shield.

Then, the new Holy Power was quickly absorbed into the Relic, which had completely lost its Holy Power, as it touched the surroundings.

Stella didn't care that the shield that had been protecting her had disappeared.

After all, that didn't matter.

"With this, directly… above that monster's head…"

"Wait a minute."

Just as Stella was about to use space magic.

Uriel, who was next to her, stopped Stella.

"Uriel…?"

"Let me do it."

"… No."

I didn't want to make my friend do something like this.

"I, I still have a shield left."

"The moment you hold this Relic, the shield you have will disappear. Because… there's still a lot of Holy Power missing."

"Then shouldn't I use this Holy Power that's protecting my body as well?"

"…"

She wasn't wrong.

I was vaguely thinking of bringing the Relic to share Holy Power, but the problem was what would happen after that.

If she was hit directly by Fenrir's attack, Stella would definitely not be safe.

"I can… endure it."

"No…! If you die, then…"

"Then do you want me to watch you get hurt?"

"…"

Stella couldn't say anything.

Someone had to step up.

Fenrir was barely being dealt with by Evan and Mirnel, so she couldn't ask them. She couldn't ask Uriel to do it either, so she was going to do it herself.

But Stella also knew.

The moment she teleported to that side, where a tremendous amount of attacks were being exchanged, even if she succeeded in sharing Holy Power, her body would be torn to shreds.

She wasn't a great mage yet, so there was no place for her to intervene.

But Uriel was different.

If she quickly inserted Holy Power and got out, she might get hurt, but there was a high chance she wouldn't die.

If you consider efficiency, that was the best option.

Stella gritted her teeth.

'Is this… all I can do…?'

To have to send a friend she had just made to her death.

Stella was biting her lip, but she was painfully aware that there was no other way.

There was no other way.

"Please… Uriel…"

"Leave it to me."

As she handed the Relic to Uriel, the Holy Power that had been protecting Uriel was absorbed into the Relic.

Stella turned her head and looked back at Mirnel, who was providing cover fire from afar.

"Ugh… it's not easy to hit…"

Her arrows had great power, but hitting was the problem.

It wasn't easy to hit Fenrir, who was clashing at supersonic speeds that ordinary people couldn't even see, with just a bow.

"Mirnel."

"What?"

"I have a favor to ask."

Just a moment.

Just a very short moment would do.

"I've come up with a plan."

"… Tell me."

At Mirnel's words, Stella nodded.

She began to explain the plan to neutralize Fenrir.

9 - The Wolf That Swallows the God

The operation was simple.

Simple, but dangerous.

"...Are you really going to be okay?"

Uriel nodded at Mirnel's question.

After all, if things continued as they were, everyone would die, so Uriel decided to trust in her own power.

No... it wasn't just her power.

"I'll make sure to succeed."

Everyone's power was contained here.

Mirnel would create an opening, and Stella would Teleport her directly.

Then, she would bring the Relic imbued with Holy Power directly to the Relic embedded in the Magic beast's head and resonate them.

It was an extremely difficult task to actually carry out, not just in words.

But she had to do it.

"It'll only take a moment."

It would only take a moment.

Uriel wondered why Mirnel was speaking as if she knew so much about it, but right now, weakening Fenrir by bringing the Relic to its head was more

important than asking Mirnel about it.

"The arrows with strong power risk collapsing this chamber, so I've only been able to fire arrows with high penetration... but it should hold up for one shot."

As she said, Mirnel was only using arrows with high penetration.

It wasn't easy to blatantly fire arrows with strong power in an underground chamber that was already on the verge of collapse.

If Fenrir hadn't been about to attack, she might have considered firing a strong attack...

"Indeed..."

Since they were already on the verge of collapse due to Fenrir's powerful attacks, if they launched a strong attack here, everyone would die.

That's why she was only firing arrows with high penetration, but even that was difficult to hit because Fenrir's speed was so fast.

Only a skilled archer like Mirnel could hit it.

Even then, the attacks, which only had high penetration, couldn't inflict much damage, so they were only suppressing its movements.

"It might be tough... but I'll create an opening. The Hero won't stop attacking either, so there should be a pretty long gap."

"..."

As Mirnel said, Fenrir was currently focused on fighting Evan.

But if they could inflict a significant flinch with strong firepower.

If they could create even a small opening through that...

"Yes...!"

Uriel nodded and drew Demonic energy into her body.

The armor she was wearing was also a treasure of the Empire, and it had the ability to become stronger as she drew Demonic energy into it.

Even so, if she was attacked by that Magic beast, which seemed to be at least a Demon King Army executive, her defense wouldn't mean anything, and it would be brutally shattered, but it would block some glancing blows.

Uriel trusted in that and stepped forward.

"I'll Teleport you... you have to come back safe, okay?"

Stella prepared her magic, and Mirnel, confirming it, nodded and gathered Demonic energy into her bow, saying it would only be once.

"I hope it doesn't collapse. I don't know if I can control my power after so long."

As Mirnel continued to say incomprehensible things, the moment she released the bowstring,

"Milliem Rain."

The arrow shot into the sky became a rain of thousands, tens of thousands of arrows and poured down on Fenrir.

Each arrow had the power to pierce even steel.

Grrr...!

Fenrir, who had been charging towards Evan, was startled as soon as he saw the rain of arrows pouring down on his head and changed direction, but...

"Wh-what, arrows...?!"

The arrows twisted in the air and turned towards the direction Fenrir had turned.

Like guided missiles, countless arrows were fired at Fenrir.

Even if he was paying attention to Mirnel, it was by no means easy to dodge guided arrows while fighting Evan.

He couldn't even deflect the arrows because of Evan.

"Where do you think you're going...!"

Evan hadn't grasped the exact situation, but he knew that he had to make sure that attack hit.

He explosively drew Holy Power into his Holy Sword and swung it.

It was an attack that could have been easily blocked or evaded under normal circumstances, but Fenrir, already distracted by Mirnel's attack, could only choose between dodging Evan's attack or dodging Mirnel's attack.

In this either-or situation, Fenrir made a quick decision.

It was an instinctive judgment that it would take less damage from an attack made of ordinary Demonic energy than from an attack containing Holy Power from Evan's Holy Sword.

However, it wasn't a good idea.

Evan's attack, though containing Holy Power, wasn't a very strong attack.

Mirnel's attack, on the other hand, was different.

Each arrow contained the power to tear through even steel like paper.

Pshshshsh!

In the end, Fenrir's body, pierced as he dodged Evan's attack, burst open with large holes, and blood gushed out.

Grrrk...

Fenrir, instantly turned into a rag, let out a painful groan and vomited blood from his mouth.

He couldn't even make a proper sound because his entire torso was pierced.

His posture collapsed because the muscles that could give him strength were all torn.

"Now's the time!"

At Mirnel's shout, Stella cast Teleportation magic.

Uriel's body disappeared in an instant and appeared above Fenrir's head.

"Ugh..."

Uriel, appearing above Fenrir's head, which was covered in Demonic energy-filled blood with his whole body turned into a rag, took out the Relics.

Relic of Purification, Relic of Healing.

And...

'Relic of Barrier... was it...'

She didn't know what would happen next.

She only knew that Fenrir would be greatly weakened if she did this.

"Haaaah!"

Uriel gripped the two Relics tightly with both hands and slammed them down towards Fenrir's head, where the Relic of Barrier was embedded, as she fell.

Bang!

The moment the hand holding the Relics touched the Relic of Barrier,

Hwaaaa

The three Relics containing Holy Power were momentarily connected, and the Holy Power of the Barrier was activated.

Kuaaaa!

"Wa, wait..."

Chwaak!

Fenrir let out a painful scream at the light flowing out from the Relic of Barrier embedded in his head and swung his claws at Uriel, who was riding on his head.

"Kyaaak!"

Kwang!

Uriel's armor shattered, and she flew away bleeding and crashed into the wall.

"Uriel!"

"There's no time to worry! We have to pour all our attacks in quickly! Is your Demonic energy okay?"

"I'm okay for now...!"

Stella would have consumed a lot of Demonic energy just from using Teleportation magic, but she had drastically reduced Demonic energy consumption through a long period of research.

It didn't consume much Demonic energy to Teleport someone just a short distance.

And...

"How dare you hurt Uriel...!"

Stella said, holding a high-level magic, Lightning Sphere, in her hand.

"That's enough."

Mirnel, nodding at that, drew her bowstring.

Stella also gathered Demonic energy and cast Lightning Sphere in succession.

"Die, you monster!"

Stella, confirming that numerous spears had appeared in the air, threw them at Fenrir without hesitation.

Numerous spears of lightning pierced Fenrir's entire body.

Krrrrrrrrr!!

After letting out a sound full of pain from the electricity, his ferocious eyes turned towards Stella and Mirnel.

However,

"Explode!"

Mirnel had already prepared a follow-up attack.

Mirnel, creating a giant arrow, fired it through the holes in Fenrir's body.

Pook!

The moment the arrow was embedded inside his body, Fenrir's body began to heave.

Kking! Kking!

The arrow that had burrowed into his body was detonating Demonic energy and destroying him from the inside.

Fenrir, judging that he couldn't go on like this, widened his eyes.

With bloodshot eyes, Fenrir grabbed his bleeding body and drew Demonic energy into his entire body.

Kuaaaaaaa!

Just as Stella and Mirnel were panicking at the Demonic energy spewing out from Fenrir's entire body, he charged towards them at an incredible speed.

It was clearly faster, though noticeably slower than the overwhelming speed he had shown at first.

"Oh no...!"

Evan, who had been gathering strength while thinking that Fenrir had been greatly injured and temporarily fainted, was flustered when Fenrir charged towards the two of them.

Stella and Mirnel were also in a situation where it was difficult to move immediately because they had just launched their attacks,

"I, in this case...!"

Stella, judging that she had to use a hasty Blink even if she had to endure internal tremors, was about to reach out her hand to Mirnel.

Thud thud

"...!!"

Stella, startled by the sound of someone approaching, turned her head.

And there...

Swoosh!

"Where... do you think you're going..."

Drip, drip

Having thrown off the armor that had been completely shattered by the previous attack,

Uriel, covered in blood, was there.

With a limping leg, she stood in Fenrir's path and slashed at Fenrir's legs with a red glowing greatsword as he charged.

The royal family's treasured sword had exhausted its power.

Kking?!

Kwagwagwag!

Fenrir, instantly losing all four legs, lost his balance in the air and rolled on the floor.

"Uriel!"

"Please... Evan..."

Thud!

Evan called out to Uriel, but Uriel, who had exhausted her strength from the previous attack, knelt down and collapsed on the floor.

The final blow.

Evan, standing in front of Fenrir, who had already lost all four legs and was bleeding profusely from the holes in his body, raised his Holy Sword.

"Thank you... Uriel."

Evan looked down at Fenrir, who was lying down, breathing heavily, and looking up at him.

It was clear that there would be more casualties later.

It was right to cut off his breath here.

Evan brought down his Holy Sword towards Fenrir's neck.

The Holy Sword easily pierced through, so easily that it felt like the tough hide was a lie.

Krrk... Krrrk...

Fenrir let out a dying scream full of pain from the Holy Power entering his body, and then breathed his last.

"...It's over."

Evan slumped down in his seat.

The Wolf that Devours Gods, subjugation successful.

The Wolf That Devours God (Interlude)

"Aria! Uriel!"

As soon as the subjugation succeeded, Evan and Stella rushed to where Aria and Uriel had collapsed.

Uriel's injuries were more urgent than Aria's, who could be healed later with Holy Power and was currently unconscious and unable to feel pain.

"Haa… Haa…"

Fortunately, thanks to her armor, she was able to avoid instant death, but Uriel was in pain, wounded by Fenrir's Demonic energy-laden claws.

It was spreading through her body like poison.

"...Exposed to Demonic energy. At this rate, she'll die soon."

Mirnel said with a look of pity.

Even the armor couldn't completely block Fenrir's attack.

"Uriel…"

Stella muttered Uriel's name with a guilty expression.

If she hadn't been there for this subjugation… it would have been impossible to subjugate Fenrir.

Uriel had made the greatest contribution.

"Am I… going to die…? Cough…"

"D-Don't talk…"

Uriel continued, coughing up black blood.

"...Actually… dying feels like something far away… The feeling of Demonic energy spreading through my body… isn't very pleasant…"

"…"

"If I die… Aria will definitely bring me back to life, right…? I didn't want to cause Aria pain…"

She could be revived.

Aria had the power to revive even the dead.

She would have to bear Uriel's wounds, but it was possible to revive the dead Uriel.

But…

'I don't want to let that happen...'

Aria would have to endure Uriel's wounds, and Uriel would have to experience something that no human would want to experience: dying and coming back to life.

Was there really no other future?

Was there anything he could do?

Evan pondered and pondered.

A way to save Uriel.

Was there such a thing?

It was then.

"The Water Relic…"

Evan suddenly thought of the Relic.

Could the healing Relic heal Uriel?

Thinking so, Evan hurriedly approached the place where the Relic had fallen and picked up the healing Relic.

A subtle yet warm light flowed from the Relic.

- Evan… that's…

"The Water Relic… it was definitely healing Holy Power. With this, maybe I can heal Uriel…?"

Everyone's eyes widened at Evan's words.

The thought that healing Holy Power might be able to do it.

"Please, Estel. Help me."

Evan said to Estel with a serious expression.

It wasn't easy for him to use the Relic as he pleased.

So, in order to borrow the power of the healing Relic that was using Holy Power, he needed Estel's help.

But…

- No. That's impossible.

"...What?"

- Evan… haven't you forgotten? The reason Aria can revive the dead or save those poisoned by Demonic energy… while enduring the pain and resulting wounds in her own body, is purely because Aria has accepted

the power of God, which is not suitable for a mortal body, into a mere human body.

"That's…"

- The healing Relic only amplifies that power. But… I don't originally have healing power, and even if I, the Holy Sword with only the Holy Power of a Hero, use the healing Relic, I won't be able to heal Uriel with it.

"Why…"

- If it were ordinary Demonic energy from a demon, it would be possible. But… if Demonic energy of a certain concentration or higher is directly injected into the body and causes poisoning, even priests give up. Let alone the Demonic energy of a Magic beast who is at least a Demon King Army executive… it's absolutely impossible.

"…"

Evan was speechless.

Even his last hope had vanished.

He thought he could heal Uriel with this, but the power of Demonic energy had shattered even that hope.

But…

"...Evan?"

Evan didn't stop.

He brought the healing Relic he was holding to Estel.

- Evan… what are you doing?

"Even so… I want to heal her with Holy Power. No, I have to."

- Even if you know it's a meaningless act…?

"Yeah… At least… I want to ease her pain."

Evan was serious.

Even though she was directly exposed to Demonic energy, he thought that if he tried to heal her with Holy Power, he could at least reduce her pain.

"E… van…"

Uriel looked up at Evan with trembling eyes.

Uriel's body was melting.

She was dying in real time.

He couldn't let her suffer any longer.

- … Okay. I'm not comfortable either. Maybe it's better to do that.

Estel said that, sighed, and told him to bring the Relic to her Holy Sword.

No, she was about to say that.

"[Wait a moment… please wait…]"

A familiar Thought-form voice.

Evan reflexively turned his head.

There was…

"A, Aria…!"

Aria was there.

Aria, who was trying to get up.

"You… don't overdo it…!"

Mirnel shouted in a flustered voice, but Aria didn't hear it.

She was missing one arm, and she had barely blocked the previous attack and used up all of her remaining Holy Power for buffs and shields… Now she couldn't even see and couldn't even hear the Thought-form coming from her.

Aria, who barely squeezed out the last bit of Holy Power to create a Thought-form, said to everyone.

"[Could you… tell me the direction… where Uriel is… ?]"

"A, Aria…"

"[I'm sorry… I can't see… My Holy Power… is depleted…]"

In the end, Aria lost her balance and fell to the side while trying to get up.

Blood splattered from her empty right arm, staining the floor.

"Haa… Haa…"

Stella covered her mouth with both hands at the sight of her groaning in pain and trying to get up again.

Evan, unable to bear it any longer, hurriedly approached Aria and helped her up, then took her to Uriel.

"A…ria…"

Aria silently looked down at Uriel.

"No… I don't want… this pain… to go to you…"

Uriel burst into tears.

Blood was gushing from her eyes, and her wounds were necrotizing and rotting, but even in the midst of all that, Uriel was worried about Aria.

But Aria couldn't hear it.

Aria could no longer hear anyone's words.

She had used up all of her Holy Power to grasp Thought-forms.

She had used up even the Holy Power that allowed her to barely continue speaking her own words.

Instead of her empty right arm, her left hand reached out.

Barely maintaining her balance with Evan's help, Aria stretched out her hand as far as she could and barely touched Uriel's body, then smiled faintly.

She didn't say anything.

She just mouthed words, and then, realizing that she couldn't speak, she just gripped Uriel's hand tightly.

"Aria… no… please…"

Uriel, who had a hunch about what she was going to do, shook her head like a child and muttered.

Then, light burst forth from Aria's body.

Holy Power and divine authority were different.

If only her body was fine, if only her mind was fine.

Regardless of the amount of Holy Power she had, she could save anyone.

She just had to keep the wounds as they were, without being able to heal them until her Holy Power returned.

Evan knew that.

Even knowing that, Evan couldn't stop Aria.

He didn't want Aria to suffer.

But more than that… Evan didn't want his comrade to die.

He didn't want Uriel to suffer and die, and he didn't want Aria to have to revive her while suffering from Uriel's death.

He knew.

That this situation was flowing in a way that would bring a happy ending to everyone.

Uriel no longer had to feel the pain of death, and Aria no longer had to feel the pain of Uriel's death and revive her.

Uriel would not experience death.

Aria would not experience the pain of death.

But.

But no one in this place…

No one was happy.

No one… was smiling.

Thud.

Aria's body fell to the floor.

Aria's hand, which had been holding Uriel's hand, lost its strength and rolled to the floor.

"Aria… Aria…"

Stella burst into tears and shook Aria's body.

The light of healing faded, and Uriel, who had been on the verge of death just a moment ago, was now perfectly fine, as if nothing had happened, and cried like a child, unable to control her emotions.

Mirnel could only lower her head silently.

"What… is a Hero…"

Evan clenched his fist tightly.

"Unable to do… anything…"

He muttered in a voice filled with guilt, helplessness, and despair.

Then, he closed his eyes, not wanting to see this horrific scene.

Even so, Evan couldn't escape from despair.

The claw marks were still vivid in Evan's vision.

1 - Aselina Sunlight

Uriel's body had fully recovered.

However, Aria, who had taken on all of Uriel's injuries, remained unconscious even after a week.

It was only natural.

She was already severely injured, and then she took on the injuries of Uriel, who was on the verge of death. It was no wonder she couldn't wake up.

"Haa..."

In the hospital room where Aria lay.

Evan, who had arrived first, looked around, confirming that no one else was there, before approaching the bedside and quietly sitting down.

"Estel..."

- Yes.

"I thought... if I awakened my powers as the Hero, I could save more people and Aria wouldn't have to suffer anymore... but I guess not."

Estel couldn't respond to Evan's muttering.

It was true that Evan had become much stronger as the Hero compared to before.

He showed an unbelievable level of martial prowess at a faster rate than any other Hero, standing out more than any other Hero.

In fact, there was virtually no Hero who had defeated so many executives and become so strong at Evan's age.

But the Hero himself was suffering from his own powerlessness more than any other Hero.

Previous Heroes had always grieved over the Saintess's sacrifice, but no Saintess had ever caused as much concern as this one.

Evan silently approached Aria and checked her condition.

Although she was still unconscious, she was stable and doing well.

Her body, which had been exposed to and contaminated by Demonic energy, was rapidly recovering through the Holy Power generated within her.

Certainly, from an efficiency standpoint, saving Uriel before she died was better for both of them than reviving her after death.

Only...

'Was this the only result I could achieve?'

The result was despairing.

Why did it always end up like this?

He didn't want to see anyone else get hurt anymore.

And... he didn't want to see Aria, the person he loved, get hurt anymore.

He had worked so hard with only that in mind to gain this much strength, but the reality remained the same.

In the end, he only realized that he didn't have enough power to defeat even a Demon King Army executive, let alone the Demon King.

"I... I'm honestly not confident anymore... Can I really defeat the Demon King... Wasn't that actually an impossible task?"

If it were possible to defeat him, it wouldn't make sense that they had been fighting the Demon King for so long without succeeding.

So many Heroes had set out to defeat the Demon King, yet none of them had succeeded, only managing to seal him at best. He couldn't understand it.

Until now, he had thought that none of that mattered.

But now that he had become so strong and still felt like he was hitting a wall, he couldn't help but have doubts.

- Evan...

Estel couldn't say anything to Evan, who was suffering alone.

Knowing how powerful the Demon King was, she couldn't simply dismiss Evan's words.

The Demon King was strong.

The word 'disaster' suited him.

She had even wondered if it was possible to completely destroy that monster in the first place.

But if it were impossible, there would be no reason for her to exist... so she could only believe that it was possible.

If she were to believe that defeating the Demon King was impossible, it would be the same as denying the very reason she was created.

So Estel had no choice but to believe that it was possible.

- It'll be alright. Surely...

And so, she could only tell Evan that it would be alright.

"I'm here."

At Stella's voice, Evan, who had been deep in thought, slightly raised his head and met Stella's eyes.

"You don't look so good."

"Wouldn't it be weirder if I did?"

"That's true."

Who could be happy in this situation?

"Where's Uriel?"

"She hasn't come out of her room. Her roommate says she's stuck in bed and won't come out."

"... I guess so."

It wasn't Uriel's fault.

Even Evan, who had gained the power to slice through high-ranking demons with a single blow, had only managed to fight that opponent on equal terms.

Although it was an attack launched while exhausted, there was no way Uriel, who was much weaker than Evan, could have avoided it in mid-air.

It would have been stranger if she had avoided it.

The power of the attack wasn't that strong compared to the attacks he had shown so far, but it was enough to drive Uriel to the brink of death.

Especially since that attack was swung at such a tremendous speed.

But even more problematic was the Demonic energy mixed in with Fenrir's claws.

Aria was the only one who could block the Demonic energy that seeped into the wound and melted Uriel's body like poison.

In the end, it was safe to say that if it hadn't been for Aria, there would have been no way for Uriel to survive after being hit by that attack.

Since there was no way to avoid the attack in the first place, Uriel had no reason to blame herself.

But as people's minds often are... she might think it was her fault.

All they could do was hope that she would overcome it and come out again.

"How's Aria?"

"She still hasn't woken up. They say it'll probably take more than a week this time too."

Later, he heard from Mirnel that it was a Magic beast with the alias of a wolf that devours gods, a name passed down only in legends.

A being called the king of Magic beasts in ancient times.

It seemed that it had been sealed by the Hero and Saintess of the past, who used Relic, when it crossed over to this world.

"For such a monster to be in a place like this..."

At Evan's words, Stella made a dissatisfied expression, agreeing with him.

But apart from Aria's sacrifice this time, the fact that they had succeeded in retrieving the lost Relic of earth, the Relic of the Barrier, was a good thing in itself, she said.

She never imagined it would be hidden in a place like this.

It was then.

"You were here first. You guys."

Mirnel, who had opened the door and entered at some point, looked back at Evan and Stella and said.

"Mirnel!"

At Stella's call, Mirnel, as if already knowing, held out her hand and gestured for silence before approaching.

"I know you have a lot you want to talk about. Probably about my identity... and how I have such great power. I assume you have a lot of questions."

"... That's right. I'm honestly curious."

Evan nodded at Mirnel's words.

In fact, she had hidden too much from them.

Now that she had revealed her hidden self, it was essential that she give a proper explanation.

But...

"But there's a more important story, so would you mind if we talked about that later?"

There was a more important story than that right now.

"What story?"

Looking at Evan, who asked with a questioning expression, Mirnel nodded and turned to the side.

Soon, someone walked into the room.

"... Who are you...?"

Evan's eyes widened as he saw the figure.

It was someone he had never seen before.

Someone he had never met in his life.

He was sure of it.

But why?

A beautiful woman with long blonde hair, golden eyes, and unique silver horns growing on her head.

Why did this woman in front of him feel like someone he had known for a long time?

"Ugh..."

Evan felt a headache coming on and gasped for breath, clutching his head.

Memories that shouldn't exist flashed through his mind for a moment.

"Who... are you...?"

Evan asked the woman with a trembling voice.

Who was she that he felt such a strange feeling and had such strange memories as soon as he saw her?

"Relic... I never thought we would retrieve all the Relic that were lost so long ago in this way."

The woman looked down at the three Relic placed next to Aria.

"The Red Stone of Gwangyang... The Ancient Life Stone... And..."

The woman lowered her eyes and reached out her hand.

As if responding to her, a faint brown light, reminiscent of earth, emanated from it.

"The Earth Barrier Stone..."

All the Relic had gathered.

"Is all of this... the will of the Goddess?"

Everyone in the room swallowed hard at the woman's words.

"Who... who are you?"

At Stella's question, the woman, who had placed the Barrier Stone back down, turned her head and met Stella's eyes.

Then, she looked at everyone and opened her mouth.

"... I am Aselina Sunlight."

One of the three arrangements made by the Goddess.

The guardian of the middle realm.

And...

"I am the guardian dragon of this land... and the Dragon Lord of Light."

Aselina revealed her identity... and unleashed a large but warm Holy Power that everyone could feel.

To give credence to an identity that was hard to believe.

2 - Aselina Sunlight

Everyone wore astonished expressions at Aselina's appearance.

However, Mirnel, who knew about this whole situation, didn't react as strongly.

But the shocking truth remained, so Evan and Stella stared at Aselina, mouths agape in astonishment.

"The guardian dragon... of this land... you say?"

"The Dragon Lord of Light?!"

Stella jumped up from her seat with a surprised expression and shouted.

"Is there a problem?"

"Ah, no... it's just... I've never heard of a race called the Dragon of Light in ancient books..."

"Dragon of Light... yes, that's right. We are definitely a race that doesn't exist in history. Naturally, there wouldn't be any records of our existence in your records."

Aselina nodded as if it were obvious.

"But we certainly existed. My existence is proof of that."

"Then... how come there are no records?"

"We... claim to be guardian dragons, but we would have been perceived differently by humans."

Although they are called the guardian dragons of this land, their essence is to oppose the Demon realm and protect this land from Demonic energy.

Humans live on this land, but they are merely one race living on this land.

"Sometimes we are depicted as your guardian dragons, and sometimes as evil dragons that destroy everything."

They are a race that protects the land itself, not the human race.

"Above all, we don't go around calling ourselves Dragons of Light. So it would be stranger if you knew us as the Dragon of Light. Perhaps... we are recorded as various other dragons."

Originally, when races leave records, they make judgments based on their own knowledge and record them as they please.

It would be stranger to be recorded as the Dragon of Light, a race name given directly by the Goddess.

"So that's why..."

Stella sat back down with a dazed expression.

To be honest, she still didn't quite believe it, but since only Aria could unleash such powerful Holy Power, she had no choice but to believe it for now.

Then there was only one thing left to ask.

"Why did you suddenly come here?"

Why would such a great being suddenly come to this place?

At Evan's question, Aselina quietly closed her eyes.

"Because the time has come."

"The time... you say?"

"The Hero's awakening is only one step away, and all the Relics have been gathered."

Aselina continued, quietly closing her eyes.

"Actually... I didn't expect the Relics to be gathered either. All of this is probably because the Goddess guided Aria here."

At those words, Stella and Evan swallowed hard.

Come to think of it, that was true.

Obtaining this Relic seemed like a coincidence, but something was strange about obtaining the other Relics.

When they obtained the Red Iron Ore of Gwangyang, and when they obtained the Primordial Life Stone... it was as if they knew where everything was and moved accordingly.

Was that the guidance of God?

At first, they didn't believe it, but now that they thought about it, perhaps all of that was true.

Evan felt goosebumps all over his body.

"Someday, I too must join you to defeat the incomprehensible terror, the Demon King."

Defeating the Demon King would require everyone's efforts.

Even the mighty Fenrir was ultimately just a pet of the Demon King, which showed how powerful he was.

'Can I do it...?'

Evan swallowed hard.

To be honest, he wasn't confident.

At first, he thought he would definitely defeat the Demon King, but he felt keenly that he was too powerless.

He was still weak.

Evan's power was not enough to overwhelm even that Magic beast.

Considering that he could only fight on equal terms at best, it was natural that he didn't feel confident.

Even that was only barely blocking attacks with his strength, so the word "equal" might not be enough.

He might have been much weaker than even Fenrir.

"Evan... I understand the fear that you might not be able to defeat the Demon King... the fear that you might not be able to do anything..."

Aselina narrowed her eyes and stroked Aria's forehead.

"... You have to overcome it. Because you're the Hero."

"No... I didn't come here to tell you the cliché that you have to overcome that feeling."

At Aselina's words, Evan opened his eyes wide and looked up.

Evan had thought that she was simply going to say that he had to overcome it because he was the Hero.

But Aselina hadn't come just to say that.

There was another reason.

"You must do everything you can to defeat that being."

Aselina approached Evan.

As he looked up at Aselina approaching him, he met her golden eyes.

He felt an unknown, sacred power in her eyes.

"What..."

Evan was flustered by Aselina's casual approach and took a step back, but it was already too late.

Aselina raised her hand and looked down at Evan with a pitiful expression.

"I hope... this memory will be helpful."

With those strange words that she hoped this memory would be helpful, Aselina put her hand on his forehead and gathered Holy Power.

Soon,

"Ah..."

Evan's eyes rolled back and he lost his balance and fell.

"E, Evan!"

Stella hurriedly stepped forward and barely caught him as he was about to fall backward.

"Evan! Hey! Hey! Wake up!"

She tried desperately to wake Evan up, but no matter how much she touched him, he didn't respond, as if he were dreaming.

"What did you do?!"

Stella, flustered by Evan's unresponsive state, shouted at Aselina.

However...

"Stella. There is someone else I would like to introduce to you."

"What... did you say?"

Aselina continued as if nothing had happened.

Stella pursed her lips and glared at Aselina.

Then she fell into thought.

The being in front of her was the Dragon of Light.

Just the name "Dragon" was enough to know how powerful she was.

Moreover, she wasn't a Hero like Evan, so she could be disposed of if she was seen as a hindrance.

There was no point in arguing here.

And...

'He seems to be sleeping...'

Looking down at Evan, who was sleeping peacefully, she was able to calm down a little.

"I don't know what you did... but Mirnel brought you here, and if you were going to do something, you would have done it already, so there's no point in stepping in here..."

Stella said that and got up from her seat.

Then there was only one thing left to do.

"Who do I have to meet?"

There must be a good reason for making such a proposal to her.

She didn't know what the reason was, but she was sure that it was an important reason, since it was a proposal from the Dragon of Light, who protects this world.

So she decided to accept Aselina's proposal for now.

And at that moment...

"Why make me wait outside when you could have just let me in..."

The door opened and in came familiar pink hair.

Stella's eyes widened as she recognized the face.

"A, Argen Headmaster...?!"

"Hmm."

Argen Isis.

The headmaster of this academy.

"Could it be..."

There is someone you have to meet.

At first, Stella wondered who she was going to meet, but she soon understood.

The person she had to meet, and if that person was the one who had reached the highest level as a magician in this world.

There was only one possibility she could think of.

"Well, I don't think I need to explain it at length... I'll make a direct proposal."

Won't you become my disciple?

"A disciple...?"

"I'm thinking of laying the foundation for you to become a great mage. Well... reaching that level depends entirely on your efforts."

At those words, Stella gaped in astonishment, speechless.

She couldn't believe the situation she was in.

"So... will you become my disciple?"

"..."

Her answer was already decided.

"... I look forward to working with you, Master."

There was no reason to refuse.

She too... had a reason why she had to become stronger.

3 - Aselina Sunlight

Inside the room where no one else remained, Argent, who had first sent Stella out, saying she had something to discuss, turned her head to look at Aselina.

"Putting on airs in front of the kids."

"P-Putting on airs, you say…"

Aselina replied with a troubled expression to Argent's chuckling remark.

To Argent, it felt like thorns were growing in her mouth whenever Aselina continued to speak formally and respectfully, as it wasn't her usual way of talking that Argent was used to hearing.

It was a miracle she had managed to endure it so well.

"But I can't act like I usually do with you, can I?"

"I don't think they're the type to care about that~"

"Even if they don't care… there's still the atmosphere and stuff."

"Hmph."

Argent wanted to tease her more, but she decided to stop, thinking Aselina might get angry if she pushed it further.

"Anyway… what are you going to do?"

"…"

"You can't hide it forever… no, you could hide it. It's just that you don't want to, right?"

"Yeah…"

Aselina nodded.

As Argent said, she didn't want to hide it from Aria any longer.

But even more than that, the desire to hide it was strong.

If Aria were to find out that the grandfather who had taken care of her was not even human, how would she react?

"Well… I haven't known this Saintess for long, so I can't be sure, but… I don't think this Saintess would care much about that kind of thing?"

Argent said, stroking Aria's hair as she lay sleeping with her eyes closed.

"I can't just assume what this child will think."

"Mr. Wise Guy."

In reality, she was a dragon even wiser than a sage.

Argent chuckled and recalled past memories.

The epithet of the Light Guardian Dragon, Dragon Lord, was by no means in vain.

It was no exaggeration to say that most Hero parties reached the Demon King thanks to her help. Even when she was active as a Hero party, it would have been impossible to seal the Demon King without Aselina's help.

In other words, the Demon King's power was beyond imagination, even with her presence, they barely managed to seal him.

'No… is it even right to call that a "Demon King"?'

【Incomprehensible Terror】

That was 'it's' epithet.

'It' was something whose form could not be discerned.

A monster that could drive an ordinary person mad in an instant.

"I don't want to remember it anymore, so I've erased half of its appearance, but who would want to remember that?"

A living being?

Could 'it' even be called a living being?

Incomprehensible terror.

It was a disaster in itself.

"Well, I remember it."

"Ugh, you remember that?"

"Of course, I remember it. At least for me, it's a terribly vivid memory. Even Eris's sacrifice."

Mirnel muttered with a pitiful expression.

Elves live for a long time.

Of course, Argent had also become a great mage and twisted the laws to live an incredibly long life as a human, but that didn't make her the same as an elf.

Unlike Argent, who now mostly kept the events of that time as memories, they remained vivid in Mirnel's mind.

Perhaps the reason she was working harder than anyone else to defeat the Demon King stemmed from that.

For Mirnel… the memory of Eris still remained, tormenting her.

But,

"Even so, isn't it all in the past? What's the point of dwelling on something from hundreds of years ago?"

If she were going to despair over such things, she would have stopped long ago.

Her journey was not over yet.

Mirnel truly believed so.

"You… you're making it sound too easy."

Mirnel quietly turned her head at Argent's sighing words.

In fact, she had never simply brushed it off as nothing.

Every time she looked at Aria, she clung to the memories of the past more than anyone else.

"Mirnel is an elf, so it can't be helped that she remembers it vividly."

"…I know."

Argent said in a dissatisfied tone.

"So? Do you think we can defeat him this time?"

"I shouldn't be certain about such an important matter, but… now that we've recovered all the Relics, the possibility is high. Even many Heroes haven't been able to find all the Relics."

It was the first time that they had all gathered in one person,

Moreover, in a Saintess.

It was that unbelievable.

"I'm still suspicious, are you sure that Goddess guided you to the Relics? If that was possible, she should have told us sooner."

Argent said with a voice full of dissatisfaction.

It wasn't certain, but if that gift had existed, if she had it during her time, things wouldn't have turned out this way.

Argent thought so.

"…As you said, if we had gathered those Relics when the Savior Hero party was active, things might have been different."

"If we had that, Eris wouldn't have had to die. Even if you can't know everything about people… even though that Eris… wasn't as good as the current Saintess, she still endured and tried to save many people, but it seems that wasn't enough for that Goddess?"

Aselina shuddered at Argent's barbed words.

It was true that she was angry.

Aselina was created directly by the Goddess and descended to protect this world.

She was the one who had the most reason to be angry at the current situation where the Goddess was being insulted, except for the Goddess herself.

But…

Aselina couldn't get angry.

Everything was true.

If the Relics had been given to the Savior Hero party during their time… if those Relics had been given to Eris, including Aria, the only two beings she regarded as daughters.

If only they had those Relics… perhaps they could have defeated the Demon King.

Aselina sincerely wanted to ask her God.

'Goddess…'

Was she harboring some plan that even someone like her couldn't dare to anticipate?

She wanted to believe so.

No, she had to believe so.

As a direct creation of the Goddess, she could never commit the absurd act of doubting her God.

It must have been so…

'Why did you turn a blind eye…'

Even so, doubts couldn't help but arise in one corner of her heart.

Why was there still no answer?

It was clear that the Goddess was still descending.

The Goddess existed.

But… her intentions could not be fathomed.

'Relics… the location of the Relics that no one could find… but she only gave the revelation now…?'

Eventually, doubts arose.

All three Relics had been gathered.

Of course, it wasn't that they hadn't found Relics in the past either.

Even this Barrier Stone had traces of being used by a Hero party from the distant past, who originally possessed the Barrier Stone, to seal Fenrir, the

wolf that devours gods, didn't it?

However, the strange thing was that the three Relics had never been gathered at the same time.

Even the location was cut off from information before being passed down.

Having lived for a long time, at least thousands of years, Aselina had never directly seen the Relics.

Was such a thing even possible?

Aselina turned to look at Aria.

A girl who couldn't see or hear.

She was surprised that she was still alive when she first found her.

At first, she only had doubts, and Aselina didn't ask what had happened to her.

Logically, if she was born with disabilities in both sensory organs… it didn't make sense for a child without parents to live to this age.

'Could it be…?'

Aselina soon reached a conclusion.

No way.

No way…?

It couldn't be…?

Aselina turned to look at Aria with trembling eyes.

She knew the location of the Relics that no one else knew and found them.

And until now, she had defeated several executives and even Fenrir, the wolf that devours gods.

Not only had she lived to this age with disabilities in both sensory organs from birth, but she had also performed miracles and became a Saintess faster than any other Saintess in history.

At this point, she couldn't help but be suspicious.

'Could it be… could it be…!!'

Aselina gasped and covered her mouth with her hand as soon as she reached the conclusion.

Drip, drip

"Ah, Aselina? Are you crying?"

"Ah…"

Rumania Goddess.

The Goddess she believed in had given up her divine power and was reborn as a Saintess with incomplete power in her body.

As a girl named Aria… as a human.

And eventually, to become a Saintess herself, to break this long chain of hatred.

4 - Aselina Sunlight

At first, I thought it was absurd.

Who could have imagined that the Goddess herself would choose to be reincarnated and descend?

Especially Aselina, who believed in the Goddess more than anyone else, found it even more unbelievable.

Aselina thought it was absurd even as she speculated, but she couldn't find any other explanation.

As a God, she couldn't reveal everything.

There were limits to giving Divine Revelations.

However…

If she were to be reincarnated into this world and lead her destiny directly, it wouldn't be impossible to gather all the Relics, which had never been collected in one place at the same time until this era.

"Hey, what's wrong…? Why are you like this…?"

Argent asked, bewildered by Aselina's sudden tears and sorrowful weeping.

Aselina had no idea how to explain this.

How could she possibly make them believe the preposterous idea that Aria, the Saintess of this era, might be the Goddess herself?

But she had to explain.

Aselina swallowed hard and cautiously began her explanation.

"Um… Argent? Mirnel? You might not believe it, but… please listen carefully."

"What is it?"

"Judging by how difficult it is for you to say, you must be thinking of something outlandish."

"O-Outlandish thought, you say…"

Aselina spoke with a hint of dissatisfaction at Mirnel's words, but it wasn't entirely wrong.

Honestly, Aselina thought the conclusion was strange.

Considering everything, the fact that there was no other conclusion made her believe in this absurd speculation.

“…Just listen once. Do you know where I first met this child?”

“Now that you mention it, I am curious. Although it was a few years ago, it's hard to believe that a child who couldn't see or hear has lived for so long."

“At first, I was curious too, but I didn’t bother asking the child. Actually, it's probably because I was so purely filled with amazement at Aria while seeing it with my own eyes."

When Aselina first saw Aria, she thought that this child might become a Saintess.

Not only did she possess such great potential, but despite being blind and deaf, and therefore unable to do anything, and not even knowing the language, she maintained a brighter personality than anyone else in her conversations with her.

Even though she thought it was absurd, Aria's appearance, which seemed to express overwhelming talent and pureness itself, made her unknowingly take her to the cathedral and make her a nun.

And… soon after, she found out about the Pilgrimage and came to her, asking to be allowed to go on the Pilgrimage.

She even sacrificed her own life to save someone, becoming a Saintess.

Since then, she has continued to sacrifice her body to subjugate many of the Demon King Army's executives.

Of course, Aselina hadn't seen all of it from beginning to end, but otherwise, she wouldn't have been able to subjugate the strong Demon King Army executives one by one.

And above all…

"The fact that she has collected all the Relics is the biggest proof."

“…I can’t deny that.”

As she said, it was true.

If Aria wasn't the reincarnation of the Goddess, then guiding the Relics was no different from the Goddess's will.

However, the problem was that there were more than one or two strange things if that were the case.

The fact that she was revealing the location of the Relics now meant that there was a reason for doing so…

The problem was that the era when the Hero's party of salvation was active was the time when the Hero was the strongest.

"He was the only Hero who had achieved the final Awakening… so you're saying he wasn't good enough in the Goddess's eyes."

That was hard to believe.

No, the desire not to believe it was even greater.

A Hero who had achieved the final Awakening, a great mage who spanned the era, an elven archer with the alias of Divine Archer, and a Saintess who, although not to the extent of Aria, had the highest potential among the Saintesses of all time.

They lacked nothing, yet they were ultimately defeated by the Demon King and only managed to seal him away for a long time.

“…Yeah, maybe you’re right.”

Gods cannot greatly interfere in this world.

It was an unwritten rule that had been established as a law since the creation of this world.

That's why the Goddess didn't come down directly to inform them, but instead provided information through the unnecessarily troublesome process of Divine Revelation.

If she threw all that away and came down to end the era of the Demon King and the Hero…

If the Goddess came down directly, the story would be different.

"Does that make sense? A God came down directly?"

"Of course… she won't be aware that she's a Goddess. She gave up all her memories and was reincarnated as a human to subjugate the Demon King. I've never actually seen it, and I doubt it's even possible in the first place, but."

“…I see. As you said, if she wasn't the incarnation of the Goddess… the Goddess reincarnated into this world, it would be difficult to explain her actions so far.”

Mirnel also had an expression of disbelief at first, but soon realized that there was no other way to explain it except for this assumption.

"I don't want to believe it, but… it's a reasonable judgment."

He was a guardian dragon who had lived for a long time.

The fact that Aselina, who was like that, had such an absurd thought meant that there was no other way to explain it.

Argent and Mirnel had no choice but to believe it.

“…Goddess.”

Normally, even daring to put a hand on her head would be blasphemy, but…

Wasn't she asleep now?

Even for a moment was fine.

Aselina swept Aria's hair back and gently stroked it, giving a small smile.

"Looking at it like this, she looks like a mother."

"They do resemble each other."

“…How rude.”

She might be the reincarnation of the Goddess, so wasn't that a rude remark?

She was saying that, but how could she not feel joy at the thought of looking like the mother of the reincarnation of the Goddess, who was her creator and like a mother to her?

Aselina was saying it was rude, but a smile was plastered on her face.

‘What is it?’

At that moment.

I couldn't hide my confusion as I listened to all this.

Normally, I wouldn't have failed to notice that I was awake, but the story just now was so shocking.

Above all, they were so happy that it wouldn't be easy to recognize that I was listening to their Thought-form with a very small amount of Holy Power.

Should I be glad that they didn't find out that I was awake?

Or should I be glad that I was awake at this moment?

What kind of story had I been listening to until just now…?

'I'm… a Goddess…?'

No, I really didn't know.

Of course, I knew the inside story as a game, so I was just acting knowing the facts that everyone else didn't know.

I thought that was the only way to subjugate the Demon King, and in reality, subjugation would be impossible if I didn't do that.

That's why I took the risk of being discovered and went out to find the Relics myself.

But…

'I'm… a Goddess…?'

I thought they might misunderstand something.

I had expected that someone would definitely think something was strange because everything I had shown so far was so absurd.

But…

'Even so…'

Calling a perfectly normal person a Goddess or an incarnation.

Saying that the Goddess came down directly and was sacrificing herself to subjugate the Demon King was so absurd to me.

What was even more absurd was…

‘Why does it sound so true…?’

If I didn't know the knowledge of the game, the problem was that there was virtually no other way to explain it except for that assumption.

Frankly speaking, if I was really trying to subjugate the Demon King, it would have been better to reveal the location of the Relics during the Hero's party of salvation.

In reality, they failed to subjugate him by a narrow margin, and in the end, the only option was to seal him, so the Saintess of that era sacrificed herself, according to the setting.

If there were Relics… if these three Relics were all gathered together, this era would have already found peace.

So, they had no choice but to reach the conclusion that the transmission of information was difficult due to the restrictions received as a God, so she had no choice but to come down directly.

‘Is this… the wisdom of a dragon who is thousands of years old…?’

I don't know the exact age, but I guess she must have lived that long.

Anyway, I think it's really amazing that she came up with such an idea, whether it's close to the truth or not.

Even I thought for a moment, 'Is it me…?'

But…

‘What should I do?’

It would have been better if I didn't know, but I found out.

How should I act?

I think I'm in big trouble…

Really…

Aselina Sunlight (Interlude)

“Hmm…”

In the end, everyone left without properly resolving the misunderstanding.

Just in case, I sensed for Thought-forms again to see if anyone was still in the room. Only then was I sure that everyone had left, and I carefully got up from my seat.

I still felt like my right side was empty.

‘My arm… it hasn’t grown back yet.’

It would regenerate soon, but since it was directly attacked by Fenrir and even eaten, the regeneration time was very slow.

Natural healing would take a few days, and if I used Holy Power, regenerating my arm would be a piece of cake, but…

‘Right now, it’s much better to put Holy Power into the Relic.’

It would regenerate on its own over time without me having to put Holy Power into it, so I didn’t feel the need to heal it by consuming my power right now.

More than anything, I could still feel the lingering pain from having one of my arms torn off.

‘This isn’t so bad…’

It wasn’t bad because there was a subtle, pleasant, cozy feeling.

Right now, there was something more important to do.

‘I need to start thinking about how to deal with this misunderstanding…’

Resolving the misunderstanding.

Leaving it as it was wouldn't be a bad idea, but if the misunderstanding grew this big, there was a high chance they would leave my side.

Of course… it wasn't all bad.

If they thought I was the reincarnation of the Goddess, or that the Goddess had directly descended, they would understand how I found and retrieved the Relics… they would understand all my actions so far, and I wouldn't have to deal with annoying things.

But on the other hand…

'If I leave it like this, there will be a problem when they find out I'm not the reincarnation of the Goddess…'

What if that Goddess mentioned the Relics?

If that Goddess in Romania was flexible enough to say yes even if she didn't teach me, then it would pass, but…

If even that Goddess said she didn't know, then I would be the only one who knew the location of all the Relics, and the problem is that I wouldn't be able to answer where I found them.

I wish that Goddess would just keep quiet about how I found the Relics…

But even if I said that here, I couldn't be sure if she would keep quiet or not.

In the end, all I could do was hope that the Goddess would be flexible and answer well, or exercise her right to remain silent as she had done so far.

Anyway, there was nothing I could do but pray that she wouldn't say anything.

Praying didn't necessarily mean it would happen, but what could I do when there was nothing I could do?

Bring on the popcorn…!

‘Ah… this is really complicated.’

I ran my remaining hand through my hair and lamented inwardly.

I couldn’t reveal my identity, or the truth about this world.

It’s really complicated.

I sighed and lay back down.

Let’s think positively.

‘Anyway, I defeated Fenrir… and I managed to collect all the Relics somehow.’

There’s really not much left now.

‘There’s really not much left…?’

There were a total of four Demon King Army executives.

Originally, there should be four, but I defeated Fenrir, the wolf that devours gods, who was an executive and the Demon King’s pet, so there were only three left…

I had already defeated two of them.

The Magic beast that was trapped in the Glacier of Eternal Frost below the Wailing Cliff in the northern Demon Realm.

The beast of freezing cold that brings about the end.

I defeated it.

And Maleficent, who reigned as the lord of Nastron, the land of death, and lived for a long time as a lich and a great mage, one of the Demon King Army’s greatest forces.

Although she had been reckless, even making an absurd plan to completely destroy the academy due to personal grudges, and was defeated by Argen Isis, another great mage, if she had erased her emotions and moved to destroy the world, I couldn't even imagine how crazy of a boss she would have been.

It was fortunate that she had personal feelings for Argent.

So now, finally…

'The Succubus Queen, huh.'

Her epithet was the Dream Empress.

From the point of view of the Succubus Queen, she was also the boss monster in charge of service in this game.

There were some good elements, but many users liked the Succubus Queen very much. Frankly speaking, no matter what method you used, there was no way to catch up with the favorability that went up when you were affected by the Succubus Queen's abilities.

If you made a mistake, you would go straight to the bad ending, but if you used it well, you could raise your favorability very quickly and watch various scenes, which was a very big advantage.

'Favorability, huh…'

I'm already worried.

Anyway, I have to do the Trial of Courage next, so it's a long way off before I face the Succubus Queen…

Hearing about favorability makes me feel strange.

Living in this world, the word favorability itself feels strange… because I consider this world to be reality.

'This is Stella's chance with Uriel… or maybe Mirnel.'

I don’t know which one she’ll end up with… but this is basically the last chance.

If I do well here, Stella, Uriel, or Mirnel… one of the three will end up with her instead of me.

And if that happens…

‘There won’t be any problem going back to the original world.’

I should definitely think that way.

Originally, I was thinking of finding a partner for Evan this time and going back home, but…

I’ve been thinking about it for a while now.

Is it really right to go back?

Is there really any meaning in going back?

I keep thinking about that lately.

But…

‘No, no. I don’t want to think about it now…’

I curled up like a shrimp and decided not to worry about it for now.

Thinking about this here was even harder for me.

Living here wasn’t bad, but worrying about whether I should go back home or not would only get in the way of my future plans.

It’s not like I can definitely defeat the Demon King.

Maybe even I’ll end up being sealed.

Instead of thinking about this, I should think about what to do about my identity first.

The best thing for me is to maintain the status quo, but I can't be sure that it will stay that way.

'The best thing would be to talk to the Goddess once…'

Something's strange.

Anyway, the Goddess must have chosen me as the Saintess… but I've never even met or talked to the Goddess once while living as the Saintess.

But it's hard to believe that she hasn't thought about talking to me even once when I'm the Saintess.

Frankly speaking, it doesn't make sense.

'Did she use up all her power bringing me here…?'

If she brought me from the original world to this world, and even brought me in as the character I created, it would be hard to explain without some kind of divine intervention.

If that's the case, then there's a valid reason why she hasn't said anything to me yet… but I don't know anything.

I probably won't know unless she tells me.

'Death… huh…'

I've died once before.

Dying as a Saintess is basically not dying, but even before I was a Saintess… I sacrificed my life to save Danas and came back to life.

I don't think I met the Goddess then either.

'Probably not…'

The Goddess isn’t mentioned in the game either, so I don’t know anything.

Seriously… isn’t this game too hard?

Even though I’m a hardcore gamer, it doesn’t make sense to tell me to defeat the Demon King in a world that has completely become reality without teaching me anything.

Frankly speaking, how did I manage to get this far as a Saintess who basically doesn’t have the concept of death? If I were a Hero, I would have died and ended it a long time ago.

Looking at it this way, I guess it’s fortunate that I, who originally had a perverted tendency, became a Saintess…

I should think about it after I sleep.

Originally, I had to pray in the game to recover the Holy Power I had used.

I don’t know if it’s because I firmly believe in the existence of God now… or if it’s because I subconsciously believe in the existence of God, but anyway, it recovers when I wake up, so that’s convenient.

I closed my eyes and tried to sleep.

1 - Incomprehensible Fear

"Ugh… My head…"

Where am I?

Evan's last memory was of a blonde woman introducing herself as Aselina, poking him on the forehead with her finger.

After that, he lost consciousness as if a string had been cut, and when he came to, he had fallen into a strange place he had never seen before.

"What… Where is this?"

A forest?

No, something was strange about calling it a forest.

This appearance…

"I've definitely seen it before… This forest's appearance…"

Half a year ago,

It was when Maleficent's attack engulfed the academy's back mountain in Demonic energy.

He remembers that time when all the plants withered and were dyed in dark colors.

Although the place has changed, it is clear that the plants, the entire forest, have been altered by Demonic energy.

He could recognize that much.

Evan looked around with a confused expression.

"What the hell is going on…? Where am I?!"

He doesn't remember exactly what that woman said, but he remembered the last words he heard.

Didn't she say she would show him memories of the past?

It felt too vivid for him to call it a memory of the past.

In the first place, can this even be called a memory?

As Evan looked around in embarrassment, he suddenly lowered his head.

"Come to think of it, my body…"

The feeling of his body was strange.

A strange feeling as if it had grown much larger than his original self.

He definitely felt like it was his body… and his limbs were moving as if they were his, but somehow he felt an awkwardness as if they weren't his.

He was confused and looking around his body when it happened.

Fzzzt

"Are you okay? Evan?!"

A blue-haired woman appeared from a distorted space next to him and immediately approached Evan, calling his name.

"Wh, what…"

Startled by the voice calling him, Evan turned his head and saw a familiar-looking woman.

"St, Stella…?"

It was Stella.

Although her appearance had changed a lot, Evan knew that the woman in front of him was Stella, whom he knew.

"Are you crazy?! You almost died!"

Only after Stella's scolding was Evan able to look around.

A body covered in dirt, a vision stained red, and a throbbing head.

And the surroundings were completely destroyed.

He had been blown away here by some kind of attack.

He didn't know what kind of attack it was, but if it had such an impact, it couldn't have been an ordinary attack.

Cold sweat ran down Evan's back.

"Haa… I'll help you, so grab my hand quickly. Aria is somehow holding on, so we have to go back quickly!"

"Uh, uh?"

Whoosh!

Before he could properly grasp the situation, the surrounding scenery changed.

Evan was startled as he suddenly entered a dark place and looked around.

He was still in the melted forest he knew.

But…

Twitch Twitch

Something…

Glug Glug

Something was wrong…

“…?”

The moment Evan raised his head and looked at something.

Evan stared blankly at something and froze on the spot.

"What… is this…"

No.

It wasn't a dark place.

This place where he was was definitely not a dark place.

Something… an indescribable, huge something was blocking the sun.

Evan rolled his eyes with trembling eyes.

【Incomprehensible Horror】

He was only then able to realize the meaning of that epithet.

No, perhaps even that epithet, which was filled with awe, mystery, and fear, became meaningless the moment he confirmed the reality with his own eyes.

How could something like that exist in this world?

This…

Is this the Demon King…?

No way it's the Demon King…

"Ugh, why are you suddenly like this!"

Paak!

He felt something hit the back of his head.

Stella, who still had terrified eyes but looked somehow different… no, more like she had grown, was still sighing and looking at Evan.

"Everyone here will die if you don't get your act together!"

"Th, that's…"

"Aria, who you like so much, is fighting that monster, are you going to keep being scared like that?!"

"…"

Evan felt wronged.

Just a moment ago, he was worried about Aria lying in the hospital room.

Suddenly, a woman named Aselina, who introduced herself as the guardian dragon of this world, came and poked him on the forehead with her finger, and when he came to his senses, he was here.

But suddenly, he has to catch the Demon King?

What is all this about?

He was confused, but Evan was guessing.

This world was not reality.

Evan recalled the last words that woman, Aselina, had said to him.

'I hope these memories will be helpful.'

Memories?

Didn't she say memories?

'This isn't a memory…'

As if he had already experienced it…

Throb!

"Ugh…"

Evan felt his head ache again.

It was the same pain as when a fragmentary memory he didn't know about came to mind a while ago.

Evan looked around.

Holy Power was gathering in the body of a blonde, long-haired girl, somehow pushing back something called the Demon King.

It won't last long.

He had to prevent 'that' from taking root in this world.

"Okay, I got it…"

There were still many things he didn't know.

But why?

Evan gripped the handle tightly.

At least… he knew what to do in the current situation.

"I'll do something about it."

Facing that monster in front of him.

That was his duty.

And "Evan" knew how to deal with that monster.

"Haa… Haa…"

Strong.

Even though he had poured everything into it, that amorphous monster did not stop trying to spread into the world.

'That's… the Demon King…?'

Can that really be called the Demon King?

Doesn't Demon King mean the king of demons?

It was a big shock for Evan, who thought it would at least be a king-like existence.

It's called the Demon King, but it was practically a disaster.

It corrodes and contaminates just by touching it.

As if it couldn't tolerate something existing in this place where he exists, it was trying to devour everything.

And it was expanding even more, using it as nourishment.

What he was doing now was not subjugating the Demon King.

A struggle to survive.

It was just a human's struggle to escape from disaster.

"Damn it, it won't budge…"

Mirnel said, sweating profusely.

Even though he poured out all his attacks, that part would disappear, but it would regenerate and encroach on the surroundings.

It seemed like it didn't have a shape, but it definitely had a shape.

It was clearly injured, and when it was damaged by strong attacks or Holy Power, it would shrink and that area would be purified and disappear.

But more than that,

"It's constantly increasing itself by using this continent as nourishment… At this rate…"

Mirnel said, sweating profusely.

With a confident yet desperate voice.

"This world… will be destroyed."

A disaster has come to the land of life.

An existence that only eats everything and proliferates itself.

But that existence was enough to be called a disaster.

"Why… did it invade first…!"

Mirnel muttered with a resentful expression.

The Demon King… invaded first?

Wasn't that a natural thing?

He had poured his strength into somehow stopping the Demon King, and he was so breathless that he felt like he was about to collapse, but Evan sensed it.

He had to ask about this.

"What are you talking about, Mirnel…? Wasn't it originally the Demon race who invaded first?"

“… Are you finally out of your mind?”

"…"

Evan froze at the sudden curse.

"Come to think of it, I wouldn't have told you."

However, Mirnel soon sighed as if he understood and answered.

“… The Demon King has never invaded in history. In the first place, the Demon King was not a conscious being. Even in the era of the Hero party of Salvation, when we sealed the Demon King… we went directly to the Demon realm where the Demon King existed and attempted to subjugate it, and failed."

『Incomprehensible Horror』

The meaning is incomprehensible horror.

From the beginning, the Demon King Army executives were not executives.

It was just a story of those who worshiped the disaster gathering under it.

“… Th, that means…”

Mirnel nodded at Evan's question.

"That's right. It is the first time that the Demon King has descended on this land where humans… life breathes."

Even though it was a calm voice that only told the truth, why?

Evan had goosebumps all over his body.

As if he had missed something.

2 - Incomprehensible Fear

“There’s no way to subjugate that monster now that it has descended upon this world.”

Evan lowered his head at Mirnel’s despairing words.

He couldn’t believe what Mirnel was saying. The Demon King he knew wasn’t a Demon King at all, but simply a word for a monster.

He especially didn’t want to believe that the fight was already lost the moment that monster descended upon this world.

“Why…? What changes when it descends…?”

“It wasn’t this strong when it was in the Demon realm. Not only has it descended, but this absurd power… it must be growing stronger by consuming the power of this world. I don’t know all the details myself, though.”

Even Mirnel, who had faced the Demon King once before, couldn’t understand the reason for its overwhelming strength.

No, could it even be called strength?

It felt like fighting a legion that endlessly revived no matter how many times you killed them.

Seeing as it wasn’t this strong when he fought it, there was only one reason.

‘It’s because it descended upon this world…?’

Mirnel seemed to have given up on subjugation long ago.

It was an opponent that couldn’t be defeated even if he poured everything he had into it.

Mirnel had already poured out everything long ago.

It wasn't just Mirnel.

Stella, Uriel… everyone had poured out everything they had, yet they hadn't inflicted any significant damage.

Even Evan himself… even after pouring all his mana and unleashing Holy Power, he couldn't stop the monster's advance.

It was as good as saying that they had been fighting a meaningless battle from the moment it descended upon this world.

'Ah…'

Is this really how everything will be destroyed?

Will everyone have to die like this, without being able to do anything?

He desperately wanted to do something, but he didn't know what to do in this situation, and even if he did, he didn't know if he could do it.

It was the first time he had felt so powerless since becoming the Hero.

'I thought I could do something if I just got stronger…'

Evan, who had always thought that his powerlessness was due to his weakness, felt even more despair in the current situation.

He had definitely become much stronger than when he was in his original world, yet he was still trapped in the despair of not being able to do anything.

Stella's magic didn't work.

Even when Estel's sword cut it, it only split apart, and even when Mirnel's arrows pierced it, it quickly regenerated as if the previous attack was a lie.

Even when Aria gathered Holy Power and purified it, it only detached that part and multiplied again.

And even the Holy Sword attack, imbued with all of Evan's Holy Power.

The Demon King didn't care, as if it was nothing.

It was truly overwhelming.

Evan clenched his fist tightly.

What about the Hero party of salvation…?

No, before that, hadn't the Hero parties of the past, who always faced the Demon King, always faced this monster?

How on earth were they able to seal it against this monster?

"[…After all, I think this is the only way.]"

It was then.

Evan heard a Thought-form that felt all too familiar.

He reflexively raised his head and turned towards the direction of the Thought-form, and there he saw Aria, who had clearly grown a little but still looked like a girl.

"[I will step forward.]"

"Step forward… what can you do in this situation…"

As Evan said that, he suddenly felt something was wrong.

Although the current Demon King had descended upon this world, he had heard that the Hero parties of the past had gone to the Demon realm to face the Demon King.

Was the Demon King weak when it didn't descend upon this world?

That couldn’t be.

If that were the case, the previous Heroes wouldn’t have failed to subjugate the Demon King and would have continued to only seal it.

And… Argen Headmaster and Mirnel, who were in charge of the party at that time, said that a Saintess named Eris had sacrificed herself to seal the Demon King.

He had brushed it off without much thought back then, but now that he thought about it, something was strange.

The fact that the Saintess Eris sacrificed herself to seal the Demon King… meant that the Saintess herself had to sacrifice her life to seal the Demon King.

Evan’s body began to tremble slightly.

These were things he was experiencing for the first time.

But everyone’s appearance, this current situation.

And his memories were clearly telling him.

“Wait… Aria…?”

If Aria was stepping forward in this situation, there was only one possibility.

Evan called out to Aria in a trembling voice.

Having heard about what happened to the Saintesses who had sealed the Demon King in the past, and what they had done, he could see a future he didn’t even want to think about.

He felt like his body wasn’t his own.

Evan was flustered.

‘M-my body…’

His body, which had been moving as he pleased just a moment ago, was now moving on its own.

As he approached Aria, Aria turned her head slightly and met his eyes.

For the first time, Aria’s eyes were open.

Although her eyes had lost their light from birth and were completely blurry, he could feel her strong will.

“[I think I know what I have to do now.]”

“You… you don’t mean…”

“[Evan, you told me before… that you liked me.]”

“Yeah… I like you. So please…”

“[You said you’d tell me your answer after we subjugated the Demon King, but… I don’t think that’ll be possible.]”

Aria said with a bitter smile.

Evan gritted his teeth.

“[I’m sorry, Evan. And everyone. I don’t think I’ll be able to be with you in the future.]”

Aria, looking at his location with her blurry eyes, closed her eyes again.

Then, she looked around.

Stella and Uriel… and Mirnel.

In the distance, there were countless imperial soldiers and mages, priests and holy knights of the Holy Kingdom, and professors of the academy, the

archmage and headmaster of the academy, Argen Isis, all barely managing to block the Demon King's attack.

This place where they were was the front line.

Only the Hero party had come to this place to subjugate the Demon King.

Aria, looking around at everyone, said with a smile.

"[I'm sorry for causing you all so much trouble…]"

"Aria… you…"

Stella, as if sensing what Aria was about to do, was slowly making a look of astonishment.

Mirnel, knowing that the situation had already gone too far to do anything about it, and knowing that there was no other way, simply turned his head away without a word.

"You, you can't… no… that… that…"

Stella tried to stop Aria with a dumbfounded expression, but it was already too late.

Light was erupting from Aria's body.

"[Should I say it's fortunate that I collected all the Holy Relics… They say that if all the Holy Relics are gathered, they will grant any wish, just once.]"

"Is that… possible…?"

The Holy Relics, treasures bestowed by the Goddess.

Objects that Rumania Goddess divided into the three gods of the sun, water, and earth, corresponding to power, wisdom, and courage, and bestowed upon this land, the very foundation of this world.

If the power within these Holy Relics is full and they are all gathered, they can grant any wish.

That's what they said.

"[But the wish has already been used.]"

At that, Evan's eyes widened.

Clearly, the power within the Holy Relics was empty from the first time he saw them.

That was why Aria had to infuse Holy Power to activate them.

Evan, anticipating what she was going to say next, tried to call out to Aria, but soon noticed that Aria's body was fading.

"[If I pour the Goddess's authority… everything I have into the Holy Relics… we can destroy the Demon King.]"

Aria raised the Holy Relics.

Soon, the three Holy Relics flew into the air and merged together as if they were one.

Whoosh…

A huge light began to erupt from the Holy Relics.

The light flowing from Aria's body flowed into the Holy Relics, emitting an even greater light.

The more the light flowed out, the more Aria's body faded.

"I have one… request."

It was the first time.

Aria’s body was fading, but for some reason, her blurry eyes were slowly coming to life.

“Please don’t think that I sacrificed myself for you.”

Aria’s voice, which had only communicated through Thought-form because she didn’t know the language, was now directly audible.

“Are you going to die…?”

Stella asked Aria in a trembling voice.

Aria simply smiled without answering.

“Why… why… why does it have to be like this…?”

Uriel knelt down in place and sobbed.

Aria shook her head as if it couldn’t be helped.

Who could have predicted this situation?

“…”

Aria looked around and found Evan, then approached him.

Then, she brought her hand to Evan’s face.

“It’s the first time I’ve seen your face…”

Swish

“Aria…”

Evan, who had grabbed Aria’s hand with one hand, then grabbed Aria’s hands with both hands and began to weep.

“Evan…”

“I’m sorry… if… if I was just a little stronger…”

Aria silently looked at Evan.

While holding Evan’s other hand as he lowered his head and wept, Aria replied.

“…Don’t be sorry.”

Aria said, closing her eyes.

“Don’t blame anyone. It’s no one’s fault.”

It was no one’s fault.

Evan had worked harder than anyone else to subjugate the Demon King.

He was just unlucky.

“I hope you forget me… and live happily in a peaceful world.”

“No… I… I…”

“Ah, I almost forgot to say this.”

As if she had just remembered, Aria said softly in a tearful voice.

“I love you, Evan.”

With the tears that fell on his hand as the last of her warmth, Aria’s body completely disappeared.

The tears that had felt Aria’s warmth were cooling down.

“Ah…”

And he opened his eyes.

3 - Incomprehensible Fear

“What…”

When I opened my eyes, it was a familiar ceiling.

I hurriedly sat up, feeling a familiar yet foreign sensation in my body. It was definitely a familiar movement, but the events of just now felt like a dream, as if it were myself, yet they felt familiar.

What on earth is going on…?

The things that happened just now feel so vivid…?!

Evan raised his hand and touched his eyes.

For some reason, tears were flowing.

“What was that…?”

Could it be that everything I experienced just now was something that would happen in the future?

What would happen if I, who did nothing, just let time pass?

To feel the helplessness of not being able to do anything… to have to watch the woman I love sacrifice her life to save everyone again?

“Haa… haa…”

I don’t want that.

I absolutely can’t let that happen.

I don’t want to see Aria like that again.

“Ugh… my head hurts…”

Everything that happened just now is vividly remembered.

And everything feels so vivid.

Familiar yet different… the feeling of holding the Holy Sword…

I vividly felt every moment of fighting the Demon King.

I know it all sounds impossible… but Evan instinctively knew.

Everything that happened just now happened to him, or rather, will happen.

“The past… the past…?”

You said you’d show me the past, but what I saw wasn’t the past, but the future?

Is that possible?

Can something like that happen?

Aselina clearly said that she would bring back memories of the past, so why did I experience something that hasn’t even happened to me yet?

Evan looked down as if possessed.

The necklace that had been shining just a moment ago lost its light.

“Necklace…”

I don’t know what this necklace is.

All I know is that it’s a necklace that inherited something.

And that it made my growth rate much faster.

Most of all…

‘That Hero I saw back then…’

Until recently, I thought the Hero in that white space was the previous Hero.

But he looked like me, but more grown up… I had been suspecting it for a while, but after experiencing this, I couldn't not know.

'Was that… me…?'

Who would believe that the illusion from the necklace was his future self?

Even Evan himself can't believe the situation, so who else would believe him?

It's not like we're talking about a good future… we have to watch Aria sacrifice her life, not only failing to defeat the Demon King in the future.

And that we barely succeed in defeating the Demon King that way…

Who would believe such nonsense?

If an ordinary person said that, no one would believe it, but Aselina touched his head and this happened, and he's the Hero, so they would believe it to some extent…

Still, he couldn't be sure if they would completely believe him.

No, who could be sure?

That the future would be so bleak…

But…

'I have to tell them…'

I had to tell them this.

I'm still confused, but I have to tell them everything that happened there, what's about to happen.

“Hard to believe…”

Argent muttered after hearing the whole story.

Aselina also looked like she didn’t know that her actions would cause this result.

“Aselina, do you know?”

“… I don’t know either. I only meant to show the Hero memories of the past.”

“Memories of the past? What did you do?”

Argent asked, dumbfounded by Aselina’s words.

“I really just showed him the past…”

“Which part did you show him?”

“I just showed him some memories of the Savior Hero party. I thought it would help him awaken…”

“…”

Argent looked shocked.

“Why did you have to show him that? It’s not exactly a memory I want to show…”

Then he sighed, saying that.

“Well… you ended up seeing something different, so don’t blame her too much.”

Evan stopped Argent and Aselina from talking, realizing that the atmosphere between them wasn’t good.

Right now, it was more important to know why he saw different memories.

And that too…

“Your future self…”

“Is that what’s going to happen in the future?”

It doesn’t make sense that you can see what’s going to happen in the future, but there’s one problem.

“I clearly used magic to show the past.”

Aselina said with a serious expression.

She clearly used magic to show the past, but the fact that she saw the future means one of two things.

She not only nullified the magic used by the Dragon Lord of Light himself, but also cast magic to show the future…

“Or… the things I experienced were in the past.”

When I brought up the assumption I was thinking about, Aselina and Argent’s expressions hardened.

If everything that was shown at that time was in the past, it wouldn’t be absurd to see the future when using magic to show the past.

But…

“That’s absurd.”

Argent was firm.

“What you’re saying is the same as turning back time in this world. That’s impossible unless you’re a god.”

“I know that too. But…”

There was no other assumption.

If this assumption is wrong, it means that she erased or even used the magic cast by the Dragon Lord, which is…

“It’s impossible at my level right now.”

Evan could say firmly.

At his current level, it was impossible to nullify the magic cast by Aselina, no matter what he did.

It was foolish to even think about using it when he couldn’t even nullify it.

Not only Evan, but Argent and Aselina also seemed to think that it was absurd.

“Difficult…”

Argent crossed his arms and pondered.

No matter how much he thought about it, he couldn’t figure out the reason.

While Aselina and Argent were struggling and worrying, Evan, who was watching them, took out the necklace and handed it to them.

“What’s this?”

“It’s a necklace I got from the Trial of Strength. It was shining from this necklace when I woke up.”

In other words,

There may be a secret hidden in this necklace, which is presumed to be an ancient treasure.

That’s what Evan was saying.

It was hard to believe, but right now, he had no choice but to rely on this.

Above all, this necklace was quite interesting.

It had given Evan new power temporarily several times… if this necklace was the reason he saw the future…

Then there was only one thing to do now.

Start investigating this necklace.

“I’ll take a look.”

Argent took the necklace from Evan and answered with a serious expression.

He wasn’t sure if he could find out the reason, but he had to be satisfied with the fact that he had at least found a way to find a clue.

“You’ll be busy teaching your new disciple this time.”

At Aselina’s words, Argent waved his hand behind his back, saying that he shouldn’t worry too much because he spends most of his time solving the problems he gives her.

‘Is that teaching…?’

Of course, he’s a great mage, so it’s natural that he knows more about how to teach magic than anyone else, but I can’t help but wonder.

Isn’t that right?

Who would see someone who just throws a problem at you and tells you to solve it as a teacher, even though they said they would take you as a disciple?

Well… it’s okay as long as Stella is satisfied.

While I was suppressing my doubts, Aselina, who had been looking at Argent, who had completely disappeared from the room, turned her head and looked at Evan.

Then she bowed her head.

“Then I’ll be going now…”

With those words, Aselina disappeared as if she had never been there in the first place, and Evan went back to his bed and sat down.

“The future…”

The future.

If that’s really what’s going to happen to me in the future.

“I have to… strike first.”

I can’t be late.

If I’m late, there’s a high possibility that they’ll attack this world first.

I have to grow fast enough that they can’t respond and invade the Demon realm and attack the Demon King.

“… Let’s do it.”

I have a new goal.

Incomprehensible Fear (Interlude)

Anyway, it seemed like everyone had gotten a chance to grow while I wasn't paying attention, so if anything, it was a good thing. There was no reason for things to get worse from here.

I didn't know exactly what Evan was going through, but…

Who knows?

Maybe while I was resting like this, everyone would come back even stronger than they were now…

As time passed and my body recovered to some extent, I exclaimed,

"Hoo!"

I'm fully revived!

"Haaa…"

That was so long.

How long was I lying down?

I don't really remember…

'Hmm…'

To be honest, it wasn't that serious of an injury, so I could have gotten up sooner, but I didn't.

You might say it would be better to get up early since other people would be worried.

Hah… Since when did I start caring about that?

Actually, putting everything else aside, if I got up here just because my body was fine, I would have to go back to those boring academy classes and live my days as a nun, so why would I get up just because I was fine?

I didn't particularly want to go back to that life.

The best thing to do was to play around moderately while feeling a subtle, pleasant sensation in this injured state, and then return to the academy.

After all, all I do when I go back is offer prayers to God.

If there was anything enjoyable, it would be healing other people…

Unfortunately, it seems that most of the academy, including everyone who was there at the time, knows that I came back injured, so they won't bother to come to me for treatment.

In the first place, I have to think about whether I should even be doing treatment.

The Saintess returned seriously injured after subjugating a very dangerous Demon King Army executive under the academy's training grounds.

Wouldn't everyone try not to make me do something like that?

Even if someone's conscience exploded and they tried to make me work, most people would try to stop them.

'Hmm… I think this has happened before.'

Now that I think about it, it seems like this happens every time I face a strong enemy.

Well… This is all I can do, so it's only natural.

"[But it's about time to stop faking it.]"

I should go back.

I got up from my seat.

When Demonic energy was trying to take over my body, I felt like my body wasn't my own, but I don't feel that much anymore.

It's okay to be in pain or be restrained, but it's really uncomfortable when my body doesn't move the way I want it to, even in normal times.

This is something to be happy about.

"Are you okay?! Shouldn't you rest more?"

Uriel asked me in shock.

It's understandable that she would react like that since I, who had been staggering around until recently, suddenly said that I was fully recovered and would return to the academy.

"[I'm fine. I've already recovered completely.]"

"B-But still, you can't! Going back…"

Uriel, who was fidgeting, tried to take me back to the hospital room as if she couldn't help it…

"Eek…"

"Hehe…"

I dodged it so easily~

I had anticipated Uriel's approach, so dodging the moment she tried to reach out was a piece of cake.

I smiled inwardly at Uriel's blank expression as she looked at me.

That's when it happened.

"Pfft… Puhuhu…"

Uriel suddenly started laughing.

I didn't expect her to laugh at all, so I stared blankly at Uriel, who rubbed her eyes and said,

"I was worried about what would happen back then. I'm so glad you seem healthy."

"[Ah… Yes…]"

It feels like I'm the bad guy for teasing her.

She's so radiant that I can't even look her in the eyes…

"But the others haven't come yet. Stella said she was going to learn magic from Argent, so that's understandable."

"[Huh?]"

"Ah, Aria doesn't know. Argent accepted Stella as his disciple. I don't know why, though."

Uriel said that, but she seemed somewhat disappointed.

I don't know what she's so disappointed about, but that's not what's important right now.

The fact that Argent had taken on a disciple.

'A disciple… that guy?'

It's hard to imagine.

As someone who knows Argen Isis's background well, I found it amazing that he had taken on a disciple.

Of course, it's not impossible to become his disciple in the game, but it's quite difficult because of the conditions.

But the fact that he accepted Stella as his disciple means that… probably, because of what happened this time, he decided that he needed to quickly train a talented person and had no choice but to accept Stella as his disciple.

In the game, whether you do the quests well or not, the quests and routes to become Argent's disciple completely depend on the talent you have from the beginning.

It also means that if you have enough talent, it's enough to become Argent's disciple, but if you think about what you have to do to get that level of talent, the answer comes out…

Anyway… Argent's disciple…?

'If it's the disciple of a centuries-old loli grandma, it's the kind of material that would come out in anime.'

Unfortunately, this is reality…

She looks like she's our age, so it's a bit of a cognitive dissonance to call her a centuries-old loli grandma.

Until two years ago, I didn't want to accept that this place I'm in now was reality.

Maybe that's why I acted the way I wanted without thinking about the people around me.

Now, there are too many people who worry about me to act that way.

Even Uriel right in front of me is doing this because she's worried about me.

I sighed inwardly, but smiled and took Uriel's hand that was reaching out to me.

Huh? Hand?

But why is she suddenly reaching out to me…

Grip

"Aria…"

"[… U, Uriel… ?]"

Griiip

Uh oh.

Uh oooh.

"Aria…?"

Uh… uh oh…

"Where do you think you're going to run off to?"

"[U, Uriel… ?]"

Uh…

Uriel suddenly reached out and grabbed me, then squeezed my hand tightly.

I wondered why she was suddenly doing this, but it was impossible to escape from the grip of a trained knight.

The fact that she was considerate enough to not hurt me while squeezing is even more legendary.

"[What…]"

"Let's go back, Aria?"

"[Uh oh…]"

It seems like I'll have to take a day off from the academy.

At first, I thought I wasn't going to the academy, but it turns out I was being blocked from going.

I really didn't know…

Anyway, I couldn't just be dragged away like this. I did my best to not be dragged away by Uriel, grabbing her hand and dragging her along.

"[Ugh, no… I have to go back…]"

"W-Where is this strength coming from…?!"

If I don't go back here, they'll think I'm lazy!!

Actually, I kind of want to go back more because Uriel is stopping me, and I'm getting restless from just being here, but anyway!

I can't be dragged away like this.

I have to regain my freedom…

"What's going on?"

Wh-What.

I heard a familiar voice from somewhere, and when I turned to look, Evan, who seemed to be visiting, was looking at me in confusion.

No… What…

"Ah, you came at the right time, Evan! Aria keeps trying to run away!"

"Run away…?"

Evan tilted his head for a moment, then looked at me and widened his eyes.

"Why are you out here? Are you okay, Aria?"

"[I… I'm really okay, but…]"

Seriously, what's with these guys.

I said I'm okay, but why do they keep coming and asking if I'm okay, worrying about me, and being so eager to take me inside?

I can't believe it.

I said I was really okay, so let me go, but they weren't the kind of people who would let me go.

"Okay! Let's go back!"

"You might not have recovered enough yet… huh?"

Why are you guys thinking that on your own, aack!!

I can't even run away even if I want to!!

In the meantime, they grabbed my hands so tightly that I could feel their determination to never let go this time, and started walking towards the hospital room.

Uriel was trying to minimize the force so I wouldn't get hurt, but there was no way I could escape with Evan joining in.

As I watched my body slowly being dragged back towards the hospital room, I laughed hollowly.

"Eueee…"

Along with a timid scream that I didn't want to be dragged away. I mean, who would have known that I would be grabbed by the hair by someone I knew as soon as I came out and be dragged back?

If I had known I would be dragged back to the hospital room like this, I wouldn't have come out.

Help me~

1 - Small Happiness

Now I'm truly free...!

After being pushed around by the kids, and resting for a few more days, the two of them finally let me go, only after confirming that my condition had improved significantly. I don't understand why everyone is so overly concerned about me.

Considering that I had to spend most of my time spacing out in the hospital, it's a miracle I didn't go crazy.

I wonder if they even know how I feel.

"[Haa... Finally getting out here...]"

Even if I can't feel other senses, I can definitely feel the wind.

I may not have ears and eyes, but my nose is perfectly fine.

They should at least let me feel the wind.

"[Don't you think so, Evan?]"

"...S-Sorry..."

When I called him with a hint of that emotion, Evan seemed to think I was sulking and apologized cautiously, stammering.

Even if they're worried about me, being overly concerned to the point of being blinded by it turns worry into torture.

How painful must it be for the person involved?

Well... it wasn't exactly a bad feeling.

It's not like they neglected me; they kept watching over me.

More than that, there's something I need to take care of first.

"[Do you know... where Stella is?]"

Evan's expression stiffened slightly at my question.

He seemed to be debating whether to tell me or not, then sighed deeply and said,

"Um... I think she's probably busy solving the magical conundrums that the Headmaster is giving her... I'm not a mage, so I don't know, but I heard they're incredibly difficult."

What.

Actually, I was awake at the time, so I knew that she had become Argent's disciple, so I wasn't that surprised, but...

'Just how much of a monster are they planning to make?'

To have her solving magical conundrums, of all things, means they must be very determined.

Hmm...

"[Um... Can I go see her too?]"

Evan looked like he was debating whether he should take me.

I mean, I'm just going to see a friend, why is there so much to think about...?

Anyway, he must have decided it was okay, because he nodded and guided me.

We arrived at the place where Stella was continuing her magical studies.

"[Is this where Stella is studying magic...]"

I'll know once I go inside.

Thinking that, I followed Evan into the building.

At least, until everything suddenly went dark.

'Oh...'

As soon as I stepped inside the building, everything around me started to disappear as if blocked by something.

No...

I called out to Evan with a slightly dumbfounded feeling.

"[I can't see anything...?]"

What on earth is in here?

Well, there must be something, but I didn't like the fact that I was just blocked from seeing anything, so I vented my frustration on Evan, who seemed flustered and shouted, sweating,

"Ah, you can't see anything...?!"

Yes, I can't see anything, you idiot.

I chuckled and replied,

"[Yes. It seems Argent has cast a Barrier on this building.]"

I'm not a mage either, but how tightly are they trying to control things?

It's not just blocking magic power, it's definitely creating an area that stagnates any great power from coming and going.

What a crazy bitch...

A uniquely frustrating method that only a great mage can pull off...

Since I couldn't see anything, it was difficult to walk forward.

No, since I didn't even know where Evan was, it seemed like the best thing to do for now was to just stand still.

While I was standing still, Evan hurriedly ran inside to call Argent.

That's my guess, anyway.

A little later, a familiar Thought-form reached me.

"I see your body has recovered."

It was Argent.

"Ah, sorry, I forgot you can't see anything. That's probably because of me. I put up a Barrier to prevent Stella from using tricks."

Yeah, it seemed like it.

"R-Really... I can't use my magic... Estel? Estel!"

Evan seemed amazed that he couldn't use his magic, and even called out to Estel, but there was no response from Estel.

It seemed that Evan's magic itself was not connected to Estel, so it was completely cut off.

Hmm...?

But something's strange.

"[Then how can I see and hear with Thought-form?]"

"There's no need to block such insignificant Holy Power. Blocking that would also take my magic power."

I nodded at Argent's words.

Well, it wouldn't be easy to completely stagnate everything.

It's practically like creating absolute zero, and even though it's easier than stopping time, if you think about maintaining it for a long time...

"Well, seeing how eagerly she's trying to learn, I don't think she'll use tricks... but when people are cornered, they'll try anything. There's always a 'what if'."

Wow, she's a devil.

She throws her in there, tells her to solve difficult problems...

"Evan, take Aria and follow me. Well... you can just hold her hand, right?"

"M-Me?!"

Evan replied in a flustered voice at Argent's words.

"What, is there a problem? Aria doesn't seem to dislike it either, does she?"

But Argent replied as if there was no problem.

Hmm.

I don't particularly dislike it.

I don't, but...

'How does she know that when I can't even open my eyes.'

I was just standing still.

Ah, does she think I'm okay with it because I'm standing still?

"Um... th-that's..."

Evan started to stammer, glancing at me, as if he was tempted by Argent's words.

Seeing this kind of thing makes him seem pathetic.

He's usually such an amazing guy.

I had no choice but to reach out my hand to Evan first.

"[Here's my hand.]"

Um? Ah.

"[Um... but is this the right way?]"

I was worried that I might be reaching out my hand in the wrong place because I didn't know where Evan was.

But...

"...Yeah, this is the right way."

What.

What's with the pause?

There was a moment of silence, but then Evan grabbed my hand and said that.

I hate to say this, but that silence felt strange to me.

Did I reach out my hand in a weird place?

Since there's such a big difference in our physiques, there's a good chance of that.

Or maybe I reached out my hand in a weird place and he suddenly realized that I can't see and became solemn...

I'd rather it be the latter, but even if it was, it wouldn't be a good feeling.

'In my past life, when I saw disabled people, I felt a strange sense of solemnity and guilt.'

Now that I'm disabled myself, I feel even worse when my presence creates that kind of atmosphere, so I guess those people probably felt the same way.

'Well... maybe not.'

Gaining a new realization, I decided to just accept it.

Anyway, following Argent's words, I took Evan's hand and started walking.

"You two look good together."

"Wh-What do you mean..."

Evan stammered in a flustered voice at Argent's playful words.

Um...

'Do we look good together...?'

To be honest, I still don't know if Evan and I look good together.

It's not that Evan is ugly, but the height difference is so big that I can't help but think that.

That's probably why Argent's words about us looking good together don't resonate with me.

"Hmm, we've arrived."

While I was thinking, I heard Argent say that we had arrived, so I tried to spread my Holy Power widely, but...

"[...I still can't see anything.]"

Is she making fun of me?

"Open your eyes."

"[My... eyes?]"

I think she's really making fun of me.

Where are my eyes?

I'll open them because she told me to, but I won't be able to see anyway...

"...Huh?"

I can see...?

Not only that.

"Ah... What...?"

I can even talk?

I looked around in confusion.

My eyes shouldn't be visible.

I should either be speaking my native language, or this world's language, so it shouldn't be working.

But...

"[What is this...]"

"It's simple. I'm using illusion magic to convert the scenery, visual images, and sounds of this room into Thought-form that you can understand and sending it to you. It's a bit difficult and cumbersome, so I can only show you this much for now."

Argent said, scratching her head awkwardly.

"How is it? The gift."

I stared blankly at Argent's question.

Is she serious?

I don't know much about magic, but converting real-time images and sounds with this level of accuracy, and even considering my brain's inability to process visuals, and sending it in the form of Thought-form that I can "see" is definitely not an easy task.

I walked to the window as if possessed and looked outside.

The scenery of the academy, so identical that it gave me goosebumps, unfolded before my eyes.

It's an ordinary scene.

But why...

"Ah..."

I'm happy.

I never thought I'd get to see the real world like this.

That's why I'm even happier and overwhelmed with emotion.

"...Thank... you..."

Really.

I was so grateful.

Really...

2 - Small Happiness

I never imagined I'd see the 'real' world in this way.

Unfortunately, it's still limited, but the fact that I can feel the sensation of seeing with my own eyes is unbelievable.

Frankly, I thought the only way I'd see this world with my own eyes was by defeating the Demon King and wishing for all my senses back.

"Well… thank me to my disciple over there, who's working hard, or rather, studying hard. All the ideas and a lot of help for this magic came from that kid."

Argent said, pointing at Stella.

Even Stella was real to my eyes, not some unrendered 3D form, and I could see her directly with my own eyes.

However, it seems she can't see this side, which is a shame… but I'm satisfied just being able to see.

Just a moment ago, it was so dark that I couldn't see anything, so I was even more surprised.

I even wondered if he deliberately made it invisible at first to surprise me even more by setting up this Barrier.

More than that… I don't know much about magic, but even I can tell that this is probably space-related magic.

So, I thought Stella, who mainly uses space magic, might have helped, but I never thought it would be true.

What's more, not only did she help, but the fact that she came up with the idea to create this magic so that I could see and hear the world with my own

eyes filled me with endless gratitude towards Stella.

"Stella…"

I looked down at Stella, who was over there, clutching her head and solving problems, and was overcome with a strange feeling.

When I first met her, she had given up on everything in the world and was just lazing around, living without any attachment, but I felt proud to see how much she had grown.

The fact that she not only created such magic but is now solving magical challenges is unbelievable…!

'Sniff…'

Stella… this mom is so happy… I never knew you would grow so much…

Or was I originally a dad…?

I started to get confused for a moment, but I decided to just let it go.

I'll just be a mom… I'm a woman now, so what does it matter?

Besides, I'm just thinking this to myself.

Smiling at Stella, I turned my head and looked at Argen Headmaster.

Then, I carefully approached and gently reached out to touch Argen Headmaster's face.

"So, this is what Argen Headmaster looks like."

“… I'm only allowing this because it's you. But shouldn't you usually look at your boyfriend first…?"

Argen Headmaster asked, as if he was dumbfounded.

Ah, right, there was Evan.

No, wait, I think I said he wasn't my boyfriend, but I don't know why he keeps trying to pair me up with Evan.

Of course… it's not like I dislike it or anything, but Evan…

'No, how could I possibly dislike it…?'

Come to think of it, Evan did like me, didn't he?

I turned to look at Evan and saw that he looked no different from the Evan I saw in the Trial of Wisdom before… no, not exactly the same.

I could tell that he had become a bit more dignified and mature compared to then.

Is it because he's been through more since then?

People grow, after all.

I chuckled and said.

"I've already seen Evan's face once."

Of course, if you say it doesn't count because I didn't see it in reality, I have nothing to say, but the feeling of seeing with colorful and beautiful vision is on a completely different level from seeing a 3D map. Even if it was a virtual world.

"Where did you see it?"

"The Trial of Wisdom… do you know about it?"

"I wouldn't know."

Yeah, you wouldn't know…

It would be weirder if you did know…

"Well, you don't have to tell me where you saw it. You finally got your eyes back, right? Enjoy it a bit more. For example…"

Argen Headmaster, with a troubled expression as he looked around, approached me with a sly look and whispered.

"How about facing Evan with your own eyes and touching his face? Just to check if your sense of touch and limited vision match well."

Huh…

It seems this old woman is losing it.

The latter reason is probably all an excuse, and the former reason is probably the biggest.

No, I'm sure of it.

Well, whatever…

I turned to look at Evan.

I could have looked back using Holy Power, but I can't use Holy Power to look around right now.

I can only see if I look directly…

I approached Evan and looked up at him, who had become more dignified and grown in the past year, and carefully reached out my hand.

'She said I can only see this much for now…'

I'm happy enough with just this.

In fact, it meant that I could be in this area as a normal person, not someone with a disability.

Anyway, I felt strangely moved by Evan, so I called out to him in a slightly trembling voice.

"Evan…"

At that, Evan stood stiffly with a rigid expression and posture.

The moment my hand, raised on tiptoe, was about to touch Evan's face…

Bang!

"It's OVERRRRR!!!"

"Eek!"

Stella, who had solved all the problems, suddenly opened the door and ran inside, waving the paper with the solved problems wildly as she ran towards us.

How can the timing be so perfect… it's quite amazing.

Stella, who had been expressing her joy as she ran inside, seemed to notice that the atmosphere was strange, and her voice gradually became smaller.

And then…

"Uh…"

I, who was about to reach out and touch Evan's face, and Stella, who turned to look at Evan standing still, froze on the spot.

Solving the problems was definitely a happy thing, but… Argen Headmaster was probably looking forward to this moment the most.

And the one who ruined the moment was her own disciple…

"Sigh…"

Argen Headmaster, who had been quietly watching the scene, sighed deeply and smacked her forehead.

In that situation where I was frozen, Evan was frozen, Stella was frozen, and Argen Headmaster was sighing, I quickly lowered my hand that was about to touch Evan's face.

"Ah…!"

Stella, who seemed to have come to her senses at my actions, looked back and forth between me, Evan, and Argen Headmaster, as if she was trying to read the room…

“… I'm sorry.”

Leaving only those words, she went back inside.

'Uh… I wasn't planning on chasing her out…'

She must have thought we were angry and left without even coming in after solving the problems.

…

…

…

"I ran away because I thought I might have interrupted a good time… um… right?"

I could only give Stella an awkward smile in response to her question.

I had barely come to my senses and stopped because of Stella's appearance, but now that I think about it, I wondered why I did that to Evan.

So, I was more grateful to Stella than resentful.

However, that's just how I felt, and it was obvious that both Evan and Argen Headmaster, one an avid supporter of our relationship and the other in love with me, were disappointed.

I, on the other hand, felt embarrassed and moved away from Evan to stand next to Stella.

Evan made a sound of disappointment as I moved away from him.

But I'm not going back, so keep dreaming.

However, Stella, who looked at me and Evan as we started to distance ourselves, must have thought the atmosphere was falling apart, because she couldn't stand it and shouted.

"So, it was my fault after all, wasn't it?!"

No, really, it wasn't.

Well, Evan might give her a look of resentment, but only a little, or maybe a lot.

Anyway… I have something to say now.

"More than that, Stella, I have something to tell you."

"Oh… it feels so strange to just hear you talk… hehe…"

Please listen to what I'm saying properly.

"I heard that Stella helped a lot with the magic cast here… I wanted to thank you."

I should thank her for what I'm grateful for, right?

Honestly, before experiencing this magic, I thought the only way to truly see this world was to defeat the Demon King and wish for my eyes and ears back, as I said before… or just die. But I was so happy to be able to see colors, even in a limited way.

I approached Stella, took her hand, and shook it as I said.

"Thank you so much, Stella."

I was truly… so grateful to Stella.

For giving me the opportunity to see this world with my own eyes.

3 - Small Happiness

“Ah… um…”

Stella, slightly flustered by my gratitude, glanced around before taking a breath and smiling at me.

“I’m glad it helped. I was so worried it wouldn’t work when I was making it.”

Stella said it as if she was genuinely relieved.

Honestly, even if this magic hadn’t worked, the fact that she even thought of creating such magic for me was touching.

Even if it had failed, I would have sincerely thanked Stella.

Whether it succeeded or failed, the fact that my friend went this far for me wouldn’t change.

But…

‘The magic is even perfect…’

I would have been touched even if it had failed, but the fact that it was perfect only amplified my emotions.

‘Really… should I call this fortunate…’

It feels a bit awkward to say it myself, but I think it's fortunate that I've grown this much from a half-dead person on the verge of dying.

And… it seems like I’m growing well enough to defeat the Demon King.

‘It’ll be soon.’

If I can solve the difficult problems little by little, it's safe to say I'm quite close.

No… in the first place, they are called difficult problems because they cannot be solved… Of course, these are problems that have already been solved, but knowing the answer is incomparable to proving it all over again from the beginning.

In short, Stella is solving problems that magicians all over the world are struggling to solve quickly, problems that they are solving with collective intelligence, all by herself.

Usually, magic emphasizes enlightenment, so I wonder if she can become a great magician by doing this…

'But… Argent Headmaster is teaching her directly, so it would be stranger if I said anything…'

I can't exactly, as a Saintess ignorant of magic, start saying that's not how you do it.

Anyway…

I should ask.

"How is your progress with magic?"

"Ooh… it feels new to hear that directly from Aria…"

"Me too."

Stella and I looked at each other and smiled bashfully.

Me too.

Honestly, I thought this would be impossible without defeating the Demon King.

"So?"

Stella, who had been giggling at my continued question, scratched her head, looking troubled, before letting out a deep sigh.

“Don’t even mention it… the problems Argen Headmaster gives me are all difficult problems. It’s hard enough just to understand them, but trying to prove them all over again from the beginning is driving me crazy…”

Stella said, handing me the test paper.

I would normally think that I wouldn’t be able to see it anyway, but now I can see perfectly well, so there’s no need for that.

I chuckled inwardly and examined the test paper.

“Hmm…”

It seems to be a large circle with metaphysical shapes and strange letters that I can’t understand… but I don’t understand the content at all.

“I’m sorry… I don’t understand any of this…”

If I had focused on magic power and intelligence instead of faith, it might have been different, but unfortunately, I’m a Saintess who poured everything into faith, a faith-only Saintess.

There’s a reason why I’m the strongest Saintess in history when it comes to Holy Power…

I’m terrible at everything else.

“Tsk tsk… a foolish disciple… how can you become a great magician if you can’t even solve that?”

Stella looked dumbfounded at Argen’s clicking his tongue.

“Hey… these are all difficult problems, you know! Isn’t it amazing that I solved them?!”

“With that much arrogance, you can forget about becoming a great magician, just give up, you rascal.”

“…”

Stella looked up at Argen, speechless at his words.

“What, you got a problem?”

Stella turned her head, saying it was nothing as Argen glared sharply.

“You got a complaint or something?”

“Well… I do have one…”

“What is it?”

“Well… shouldn’t a great magician… achieve something like a dramatic enlightenment? At first, I thought you would provide some clues about it, but what is this, just making me solve problems over and over again…”

“What are you talking about? You’re mistaken.”

What.

Stella looked up at Argen with a surprised expression.

“What do you mean…”

“You just solve problems, and one day you’ll get a sudden feeling. Then you become a great magician.”

“…”

“So, I just make you solve problems, what else is there?”

“Ha…”

Stella sighed deeply and then closed her mouth.

She seemed to want to say something, but she couldn't say anything because the experienced person was saying it directly. In the end, Stella, unable to bear her anger, scratched her head wildly and screamed before stomping back into the room.

"Tsk tsk tsk… can't even endure that much…"

'It's just torture.'

Each one is continuing to prove abstruse theories that ordinary people can't even understand…

It's definitely amazing, but why is it?

Looking at the two of them, it doesn't feel like much…

I don't know much because I'm not a magician, but I don't think you can become a great magician like that…

'There was a job change quest…'

In the game, if you reached a certain level, a job change quest would automatically appear, and you could become a great magician.

In reality, it's possible to become a magician with your own authority, but if you rolled those things randomly in the game, the skills would get messed up, so it couldn't be helped.

So, the developer made it so that the authority you awaken differs depending on the player's skills and tendencies, or in the style of a hidden job…

Honestly, I don't know.

I've raised a magician character before, but as I said before, the great magician itself is just a job you can get if you meet the conditions.

There are ways to become a special great magician, but I can't possibly know all of them…

Looking at the magic Stella is researching now, she seems like she will become a great magician of space, but that's a kind of great magician I've never heard of.

Stella helped me, so I want to help her too, but there's nothing I can do.

"Enlightenment…"

I really don't know…

.

.

.

When I came outside, everything I could see disappeared.

It's a shame, but I was grateful that I could still see and hear, and even speak.

"[Will I ever be able to see the whole world with magic?]"

Even though it was for this much talent for Holy Power, the demerit of being blind and deaf was too great for me now that it had become a reality.

Evan turned to me at my words filled with regret.

And then he gave an unexpected answer.

"… No, magic is good, but still, compared to seeing and hearing directly… it's different, right."

"[That's… true…]"

He's right.

Compared to seeing and hearing directly, seeing with magic is a bit different.

To put it simply, it's like the difference between looking around with a camera and seeing with your own eyes.

However…

"[But I was happy anyway. Because I was able to see the real world after all.]"

Even so, the fact that I saw the real world I wanted to see… with my own eyes, that fact doesn't change.

'More than that, he doesn't seem like the type to say something like this…'

"… I will definitely…"

I focused on the Thought-form Evan was muttering, wondering what it was, but I couldn't hear anything more.

I don't know what he was thinking, but… maybe he has complicated feelings too.

I decided to let it go.

"Why did you leave me out!"

"S, sorry…"

Come to think of it, I forgot to take Uriel with me.

Thanks to that, I got scolded a lot, but the good thing is that it wasn't me who got scolded, but Evan who was being scolded by Uriel.

Of course, I forgot too, but I think it's more Evan's fault.

Anyway, that's it.

"Isn't Stella coming out?"

“[She probably won’t be coming out for a while. She’s working hard.]”

I almost think she has no intention of coming out until she becomes a great magician in there.

“Ugh… hearing that makes me feel like I can’t lose either. Okay, Evan! Let’s go train right away!”

“H, huh? Now?”

“Come on! We have to be diligent to defeat the Demon King, right!”

“W, wait a minute…!!”

Um… actually, he’s not the kind of guy you can catch just by being diligent…

Still, the more you train your basic physical strength, the better, so it’s not a bad thing.

Evan, being dragged away by Uriel, asked me for help, but I ignored him cheerfully.

‘Then now…’

Is it time to go back to the Theology Department?

Somehow… I don’t want to go.

But I have to go, don’t I?

I headed towards the Theology Department with slightly sluggish steps.

As a matter of course, after being hospitalized for two weeks and finally being discharged, there was nothing for me to do this time either.

4 - Small Happiness

Even after that, everyday life continued.

Everyone was doing well, except for Stella, who was receiving separate training from Argent, unlike us who were being directly educated at the academy.

Stella? Well… as you know, she's busy proving magical theories all day, so I don't know if she's doing well.

Looking at her, she seems to be doing okay, but I don't know what she's really thinking…

Plus, she comes back to the dormitory every day, agonizing over difficult problems, so I often heal her and cast blessings on her.

I even brought her a lot of sweets with Uriel's help, so I think she's doing well.

Well, becoming a great mage is the most important thing anyway…

'For some reason, Stella seems desperate to become a great mage too…'

She wasn't usually like this, but she's been working hard as if a fire has been lit under her.

It's a good thing if she's working hard, but something feels off…

Anyway, time passed like that…

"[It won't be long until the next vacation…]"

I realized that a year and a half had already passed since I started attending the academy.

During break time, I was muttering and smiling to myself when a nun who looked like a freshman, who was watching me with a curious expression, cautiously asked.

Well, it's been about three months since she became a freshman.

"Um… what do you usually do during vacation, Saintess?"

Oh, she's the first one to talk to me.

I was about to answer with a smile, but a senior nun next to her slapped the junior nun on the head and said.

"You idiot…! She's the Saintess, so of course she spends her days praying to the Goddess and purifying herself, or doing important things that ordinary people like us can't understand! Why are you asking such a thing!"

"Hmph…"

No…

I don't know what she's thinking, but I've never really lived like that…

Never…

Nev…

…

…

'Yeah, that's not it…'

Come to think of it, since I started attending the academy, most of the time I've been throwing myself into attacks by the Demon King Army executives or demons.

Every time, I came back injured and half-dead, so it's understandable that they would think I'm in charge of important tasks.

But still…

'Wait… come to think of it, am I an outcast…?'

Of course, I'm not really an outcast.

I get along well with Evan, Stella, and Uriel, but most of the students find me difficult to approach.

After all, I can't see, hear, or speak, and rumor has it that I'm incredibly devout and a true Saintess who doesn't hesitate to sacrifice myself more than anyone else…

And since I've actually accomplished things, there's no denying that's the impression they have.

Well, most of it is true, so it's not that strange.

But still…

'I think I've had more days of living normally…'

I have more memories of praying in the cathedral every day and living a frugal life, but I guess the biggest reason is that it's boring and it's just everyday life, so it's not imprinted on my mind.

Anyway… she asked, so I have to say something…

In this case, it's best to answer in a textbook manner.

"[I must fulfill my duty.]"

Well, if there's anything to do during vacation, it's probably clearing the Trial of Courage… Actually, it's the trial I'm most worried about, but at the same time, it's the trial I'm least worried about, so I have a lot of thoughts about it.

It's literally testing courage, but how much courage should a Hero have, who has to face a great disaster that will plunge the world into destruction?

At least, they must have strong courage to the point where they can sacrifice their own lives without hesitation.

I wonder if Evan can muster that kind of courage, that's the kind of worry I have.

'It's not like he's so lacking in courage that he can't handle it…'

In the first place, he's already proven his qualifications to some extent by becoming a Hero.

But I can't help but worry.

While I was suffering inwardly like that, the two nuns, who knew nothing about my thoughts, put their hands together, smiled, and said.

"As expected of the Saintess…"

"Let's go, Mirne, we shouldn't disturb her."

"Hmph… I wanted to talk to the Saintess more…"

"Quickly."

"Yes…"

Oh,

No.

No, really.

It wouldn't matter if you disturbed me, so I wish you would talk to me a little more…

I prayed inwardly, but I couldn't ask them to talk to me more.

With a sad heart, I couldn't stop the two people from leaving and could only stare blankly.

'Well… this is to be expected…'

It wouldn't be easy to approach the Saintess.

If you think about it from their perspective, it's easy to understand.

I'm just a nun, but I'm talking to the Saintess? I wouldn't think that's possible.

Or it's like a commoner wanting to get close to the crown prince at the academy, but it's impossible due to their status.

It's a little different, but it's for a similar reason, so I guess I should just accept it.

In fact, the child who tried to talk to me is amazing.

Or maybe she's just clueless…

'She was cute, though.'

It was nice… what a shame…

"[Hmm…]"

No… has my heart weakened?

Until now, I thought it was okay, but it's only now that I'm reminded that I don't have any friends at the academy except for Evan, Stella, and Uriel, and it bothers me even more.

Come to think of it, isn't that right?

I always walk alone, pray alone, and no one approaches me, so what else is that if not being an outcast?

It's me, so it makes me feel bad.

I was fine before, but the fact that I'm feeling worse and worse means that I've been alone for too long and my heart may have weakened little by little.

"[I should finish quickly… and go back…]"

For some reason, I want to see Evan.

That's just how I feel.

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"S-So that's why you came to me…?"

"[Living alone without knowing anyone is very difficult…]"

When I said that, Evan comforted me in a slightly awkward voice.

'Is she relying on me…?! Yes…!'

Um.

Uh…

Uh-oh…

Okay, I understand you're happy, but what's with being so happy that I can hear it all through your Thought-form…?

On the outside, he was comforting me with a stern, serious, and solemn expression… no, a pitiful expression, but on the inside, he was wildly happy.

It's a little absurd…

But I didn't dislike it, and I found Evan cute.

Maybe that's why,

"Pfft…"

I couldn't help but laugh.

"Why, what's wrong?"

Evan seemed flustered by my sudden laughter and asked if something was wrong.

At the same time, he was worried that I might have heard his thoughts through his Thought-form, which made me laugh even more.

He looks like a nobleman, but his actions and thoughts are so pure.

'Well… that's why he was chosen as the Hero.'

They chose the right person.

"[It's nothing. It's just… I'm enjoying talking like this, so I couldn't help but laugh.]"

Now, if I say that, he'll believe it and we can be equal friends, a normal relationship.

And yet, he's someone who treats me sincerely and worries about me more than anyone else.

He's a fool.

Stella and Uriel also worry about me, but how should I say it…

Those two feel like friends, but with Evan, I can feel his ulterior motives.

Um…

I wonder if he knows…

'Demon King… huh…'

Come to think of it, he said he would confess to me after defeating the Demon King.

If he had just said he had something to say, but saying he would confess after defeating the Demon King is basically telling me not to refuse.

Of course, I would understand even if he said it the former way.

It's absurd.

Especially since saying it that way is like saying he's going to die.

If you think about it, it's like saying, "I'm going to confess to her if I survive this war." It's the same kind of story.

Or it's like an uncle in a war zone showing off a pendant with a family photo and saying, "Look at my family. I have a daughter who was born not long ago," and chuckling.

The details are quite different, but the conclusion is similar, so it's not a good story.

Anyway… even so…

'Demon King… I must defeat him…'

Thinking about the future where I can live peacefully with Evan and everyone else doesn't feel so bad.

Really.

Small Happiness (Intermission)

As time passed, I spent my days enjoyably and busily, and before I knew it, several months had gone by.

"The semester is almost over!"

Aria nodded as Uriel exclaimed in a joyful voice.

I had been waiting for this time to come, and it had finally arrived.

"I know… I can finally rest easy… Heehee…"

I chuckled inwardly as I watched Stella, the blue-haired girl, laugh like crazy in a voice that sounded like she was about to die.

Someone once said that sleep is the best medicine.

No matter how much I restored her energy and blessed her, Stella's mental state wasn't great, as she was still mentally exhausted.

"[Are you alright, Stella...?]"

"No… I'd like to say I'm okay if I could, but I'm too tired right now… Sorry…"

"[There's no need to apologize… Shall I cast a heal...?]"

At my words, Stella reflexively raised both arms in a defensive posture.

Her feet, stretched out to the side as if to run away at any moment, were so fast that I felt a sense of awe.

'Pfft…'

I almost burst out laughing…

"N-no, no more heals… I can't sleep if I get one…"

I've never gone without sleep in my life, so I don't know for sure, but I think she must be feeling very strange mentally.

Physically, she would have received the heal and all her fatigue would have disappeared, but mentally, she would have suddenly become a body that didn't need to sleep and was always energetic.

It might be okay at first, but if that lifestyle continued for months, she would feel a sense of alienation.

I smiled and sent a Thought-form to ease Stella's anxiety.

"[Don't worry. It won't be too strong. If you receive this heal and sleep, you'll sleep much better.]"

"... Really?"

At my words, Stella, who had been trying to get away from me, began to slowly approach me again, as if tempted.

"R-really…? I can sleep even more happily…?"

Um… I don't think I said that far…?

Seeing her ask with a Thought-form full of anticipation even as she was nodding off, it seemed like she really wanted to sleep.

She wants it this much, so shouldn't I grant it?

"[Wait a moment. If I use it here, you'll fall asleep right away, so… um…]"

No matter how sleepy she is, I can't let her sleep in the classroom.

I think the first thing to do is to return to the dormitory.

"It's okay if I sleep here, so can you cast it right away…? I'll be in big trouble if I get caught sleeping…"

What's with the 'big trouble' thing again…

Whoosh!

"Ah, there you are. I've been waiting for you, Stella."

No, this Thought-form…

Stella turned her head towards the direction of the Thought-form with a trembling expression.

And of course, there…

"M-Master…"

"I heard that Aria cast a heal on our Stella, is that alright?"

As someone who had worked with the Saintess and Hero party in the past, she seemed to know that even fatigue would come to me.

I smiled and replied.

"[I'm fine. More importantly, I have a question, Argen Headmaster.]"

"You have something you want to ask? Ask me anything. I'll answer everything."

As expected of Argent.

But…

"Eek, eeeek!"

"Where do you think you're going, you foolish girl?"

"Ah, help me, Aria!!"

She was expressing her doubts to me while effortlessly holding Stella, who was struggling to escape, with one hand.

I had been wondering about this for a while, but I had forgotten about it while continuing my academy life.

"[Do you happen to know where Mirnel is?]"

When I woke up, she had already disappeared from the academy.

When I asked where she had gone, everyone said they didn't know, so I had been planning to ask Argent, but it wasn't easy to meet him.

Although the biggest reason is that I forgot.

"Ah, come to think of it. Mirnel wasn't here."

"It's been a long time since I last saw her…"

Aren't you guys being too much?

Even though we caught Fenrir together, you could at least remember her…

Of course, we didn't spend that much time together, and we didn't know much about each other, so it's not strange to forget her when you're busy with your daily life…

However, in response to my question, Argent replied in a nonchalant voice, as if he had just remembered.

"That girl? She probably went back to her hometown. She said there was something she didn't bring. Anyway, she asked me to enroll her as a student here as she pleased, and then she left right away… Annoying girl."

"[Something she didn't bring… you mean?]"

She went back to her hometown…

"I could have sent it to her right away if she had told me, but she's so stubborn… That's how elves are."

Do you perhaps hate elves?

It's possible for Argent…

Of course, Mirnel is more inclined to be like that, but even if he said he would send it to her right away with magic, she would probably refuse, saying she would rather travel while feeling nature.

Although I'm not sure.

"Well, no more questions, right? Then I'll be on my way? I'll educate our cute disciple and return her right away, so wait until then~"

"Save meeee~!!"

Leaving behind Stella's desperate cry for help, he disappeared.

Although she became a disciple because she wanted to, I should at least offer a silent prayer for her, as she seems to be going through a lot.

Hang in there a little longer…

'There's a saying that pleasure comes after hardship, right?'

I believe that if she studies hard, she will one day find herself becoming a great mage.

"[He's gone…]"

"She wasn't the type to go like that…"

"Sniff… I won't forget you… Stella…"

Aren't you guys accepting this too well…?

I cleared my throat and sent a Thought-form.

"Ahem… [Actually, I have something to do this vacation, everyone.]"

Perhaps because anything I had to do was usually important, the two of them looked at me with serious expressions.

Something to do during vacation?

What could it be, guys.

"[There's still one Trial left, isn't there?]"

Now there is only one Trial left.

"... The Trial of Courage."

Evan swallowed hard and muttered.

"[I think we should visit it again after a long time.]"

The Trial of Courage is located near what was once called the Demon Realm.

Going there is the first priority.

As the saying goes, strike while the iron is hot. Since there was only one left anyway, we decided to finish it quickly, and as soon as the vacation started, we left for the north as if we had been waiting for it.

"This is too much, really…"

Stella muttered with a dissatisfied expression.

As expected, Stella's animosity was directed towards us.

"S-sorry… I'm really sorry…"

Evan apologized with a sincere expression, but Stella didn't seem to be in the mood to accept it.

"[Although it wasn't exactly intentional, it's still our fault. It's something we have to endure. I'm really sorry, Stella…]"

It's unfair, but what can we do.

We're the ones who heard the story from Argent and decided that it was okay to leave first.

It's not strange for Stella to feel upset with us.

"Hmm…"

Meanwhile, Uriel was looking at a letter with a troubled expression.

"[Is something wrong?]"

At my question, Uriel was about to turn the letter towards me, but then she made an 'ah' expression.

"S-sorry… you can't see it…"

I wasn't particularly angry, but for some reason, I felt like teasing Uriel, so I decided to tease her.

"[Hoo… I'm glad… I was about to be disappointed in Uriel…]"

At my words that I was about to be disappointed, Uriel panicked and started to fidget.

And then,

"I-I'm sorry…!"

She bowed her head deeply towards me and apologized, which made me even more flustered.

It seems she took it seriously.

I hid my bewildered expression and awkwardly smiled as I explained to Uriel.

"[I'm just kidding. Don't worry too much, Uriel.]"

"R-really? Ugh… I'm so glad…"

No… If you react like that, doesn't it make me feel like I'm the bad guy for joking…?

"[I shouldn't make jokes like this in the future…]"

"It's a type of joke you shouldn't make to Uriel."

I nodded at Stella's words.

I knew that Uriel was pure from the start, but I didn't know that she would actually cry because she thought I was serious when I jokingly said I was disappointed.

Still, it's not a bad feeling to know that she likes me that much.

Isn't it a part where you can see Uriel's sincerity?

Still…

'I should be careful from now on…'

Because I feel sorry for Uriel…

1 - Conflict

So, everyone arrived at what used to be the Demon Realm.

Everyone looked around with bewildered expressions.

"Was it this warm here...?"

"[I know, right...]"

I voiced my own question, agreeing with Evan's words.

Until a year ago, it was an extremely cold region where blizzards raged.

Moreover, it was a barren area where it snowed 365 days a year, so the snow never melted and piled up high, making one wonder if people could even live there.

But what about now?

It was a bit chilly because it was the north, but the sun was shining brightly, and the snow had melted enough for weeds to grow, making it hard to fathom how much it had changed.

More than anything...

'W-Warm...'

It was beyond warm; it was hot.

Anyway, I thought I should dress warmly since it was the north, but it was so warm that I wondered if I had overprepared.

Well, whatever... it seems like they're doing well without any major problems.

"[I wonder if they're doing well... Lord Valencia... Lucia...]"

If they were sick or something, they would have called me, so there must be no problem.

Still, I couldn't help but anticipate, or rather, worry.

'There's a possibility they didn't call me because they didn't want to bother me...'

It would be best to go inside and check.

Of course, it would be best if nothing had happened, but if something had to happen, I hoped it wouldn't be something painful.

I would be so happy if only I could feel the pain... but there's no such convenient thing, is there?

If that's the case, then it's best if nothing happened at all.

I was thinking that to myself and was about to call out to the Lord inside, but...

Clatter, clatter

Neigh!

The sound of hooves, and the sound of a horse stopping...

"You guys are..."

At the same time, a familiar voice rang out, and everyone turned their heads towards the Thought-form.

And there...

"[Lord Valencia?]"

Lord Valencia was there.

"[It's been a while, Lord Valencia!]"

"... Saintess? Are you the Saintess?!"

The Lord's eyes widened as he looked at me.

He looked as if he didn't expect me to come here.

I thought I sent a message saying I was coming?

'Did he not see it?'

It's possible if he was busy, but I hadn't heard anything about the Lord being particularly busy, so I was a bit puzzled.

But soon, I thought it didn't matter.

That's when it happened.

"Uncle? You're Uncle, right?!"

The Lord seemed to glance over us, then his gaze stopped at one person upon hearing a familiar voice.

It was Uriel's voice.

"You are... Uriel? Is that Uriel?"

"And you're Uncle! You're really Uncle, right?! It's been so long!"

Oh.

It seems they knew each other.

Well, it's not that strange for the Lord and a princess to know each other.

"Uncle...! It's been so long~!!"

Uriel smiled brightly and reached out to hug the Lord.

"Don't get too clingy..."

However, the Lord pushed Uriel away, looking troubled.

Regardless, Uriel chuckled and replied.

"Hehe... you're so shy, Teacher."

I was surprised to see this new side of Uriel... and then she even mentioned him being her teacher.

Everyone was shocked and stared at Valencia and Uriel, as no one had expected him to be her teacher.

Realizing that the atmosphere was turning strange, the Lord, sweating, said to us.

"Well... it's not really a place to talk here, so let's go inside first."

Everyone nodded at the Lord's words and followed him into the mansion.

It was as if he hoped we would forget about Uriel's story while moving, but unfortunately, that wasn't going to happen.

'I think I have a lot to ask.'

What's going on?

I was so curious.

"Sit wherever you like."

As soon as we sat down, a maid approached us and served refreshments.

"Haa..."

Everyone sat at the table and looked at the Lord, who took a sip of tea, put it down, and sighed.

It seemed best for me to start the conversation first.

I was most curious about the weather.

Why did it turn out like this?

"[The weather seems to have gotten a lot better... what happened?]"

"... It's thanks to the Saintess."

"[Me... are you talking about me?]"

I tilted my head.

What was he talking about?

"Saintess... and thanks to the Hero defeating that Magic beast, peace has come to the Demon Realm, and even the blizzards have stopped. Thanks to you, we can live peacefully without anyone having to sacrifice themselves anymore. Thank you so much, Saintess."

Valencia said that and bowed his head.

His attitude towards me seems to have changed a bit compared to before... or is it just my imagination?

Well, I guess it could be.

However, I wanted to say that there was no need to be so formal like Valencia was now, but I decided to just let it go.

I don't know... I should bring up another topic.

"[By the way, where did Lucia go? I'd like to see her after a long time...]"

"Ah, Lucia, you say? I'll call her right away."

No, I mean, you're being too much, you know.

Anyway, I'm glad that I'll be able to see Lucia again after a long time.

Whether it was true that he would call her right away, it wasn't long before the door opened and a girl walked into the room.

"... Wow...! D-Did you really come back?!"

Lucia, who had grown a bit taller in the year, greeted me.

'Wow... it's really been a while.'

She seems to have grown a lot in just one year, probably because she's in her growth spurt.

"[Are you Sister Lucia? It's been a while.]"

When I said that with a smile, Lucia smiled brightly and hugged me.

Hmm... T-This is...

"[Y-You're going to be taller than me soon, aren't you?]"

"N-Not that much..."

She turned her head slightly, as if embarrassed, but for me, it was a ghostly matter.

Hey, isn't she really going to be taller than me...?

"[Um... are you not feeling well anywhere? Is there anything I can help you with...]"

"Don't say that. I'm really fine."

"That's right, there's really nothing!"

Hmm...

Did I try to work too much after coming to see them after a long time? The reaction isn't very enthusiastic.

But something...

'Is strange...'

Why are they reacting like that?

If nothing was wrong, they would react normally, but they were reacting as if there was something bothering them.

Mainly Lucia.

"[You're making me worry more by reacting like that. Are you sure nothing's wrong?]"

Even to my sharp question, they only reacted by saying that there was nothing wrong.

'This is really suspicious...'

Seeing their reaction no matter how much I asked, there were only two possibilities.

Either there really was nothing wrong, or there was something wrong, but it was something they couldn't tell me.

Anyway... unless it was something important, I couldn't ask any more.

"[If that's the case... I understand.]"

Even as I answered that, I spread my Thought-form towards Lucia.

Then, I easily caught her tail and heard Lucia's thoughts.

'The village is in an uproar... I wonder what's going on... Dad, really... he never tells me these things... Hmph.'

Oh, she's sulking.

It doesn't seem to be my fault.

Unlike Valencia, who can completely hide his inner thoughts and is used to it, Lucia doesn't have that, so I just poked around.

More than that, the village...

'I can say that this is bingo.'

It seems that something has happened in the village.

The time to visit the village may be coming soon.

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"Hmm... I see..."

Valencia, who had heard our story, lowered his head with a troubled expression.

It's not like I know exactly where it is located, either.

After all, there's bound to be a difference between the map in the game and reality.

So, there's no other way but to mention the things that were around it as much as possible and find it one by one...

"I'm sorry. You explained it diligently, but with this much information, I don't think there's a way to find it right away."

Valencia said with a sincerely apologetic expression.

If he's saying that much, I should just think that he doesn't know.

"Is there anyone in the village who knows the geography of this place well?"

Valencia fell into thought at Evan's question.

Oh, as expected of Evan.

With this, he had a chance to find out the location of the Trial of Courage, as well as what was happening in the village.

However...

"Hmm... there is someone, but I'll go and ask. There's an old woman who knows this area well."

Valencia said casually, as if it was nothing, but I narrowed my eyes, oh right, I don't have eyes.

Anyway.

It's a setting I've never heard of.

If it's simply a hidden setting that didn't appear in the game, I have nothing to say, but what are the chances of that?

'This might be the chance.'

The opportunity to go to the village came so quickly, it was fortunate if anything.

"[If someone as high as the Lord goes to ask something like that, the old woman will be very surprised.]"

"That's... then if I send someone..."

"[It's confidential. It mustn't be leaked.]"

"..."

Valencia had a speechless expression.

Valencia, who can't come on strong to me in the first place.

"[... So something is happening in the village after all.]"

At that, Valencia silently declared surrender.

In fact, I had expected something to be happening from the moment I felt that the reaction was a bit strange, so I wasn't that surprised.

Valencia sighed and turned to Lucia.

"Lucia, go out now."

"Ah, Dad..."

"It's a terrible story for you to hear."

At those words, Lucia lowered her head and clenched her fists tightly.

"Okay..."

Then, she opened the door and left with a drooping voice.

After confirming that she had left the room, Valencia turned back to us and opened his mouth.

"Then... let's start the story."

That's how Valencia's story began.

The cruel story that happened, or is still happening, in the village.

2 - Conflict

The story that began that way was as terrible as Valencia had initially warned us and Lucia.

"...A raped and torn corpse was found, and not just in one house, but in several?"

Evan asked, clenching his fist tightly.

Valencia nodded at Evan's question.

"I can't believe it..."

"That's awful..."

Uriel covered her mouth with her hand, looking sad.

Stella also muttered softly, seemingly angry.

It was a cruel story, enough to understand why Lucia had been sent away.

There was no way such a story could be told in front of that pure child.

"[...I think I know why you told us not to go to the village...]"

Currently, in the northern village, the Matimos Tribe lives alongside the residents of the duchy who originally lived there.

When the Beast of the Apocalypse awakened, the village where the Matimos Tribe lived collapsed, forcing them to live together.

Of course, Valencia's contribution was significant in allowing them to live with the residents...

'That's the problem...'

The residents probably opposed living together as much as possible.

It's not strange to be scared if Beast-Humans suddenly start living together.

It's just that, contrary to the perception of Beast-Humans, the Matimos Tribe are very kind people.

You might say that's prejudice, and that even though they are a minority, a bad Matimos Tribe Beast-Human could appear.

No, that's impossible.

I guarantee that if such a guy appeared, he would have been dealt with before he could commit any wrongdoing.

If you think about what they were protecting in the first place, and who they were worshiping, doesn't the answer come out?

'They are a race that worships the Sun God Solanis...'

They couldn't have done it.

I know that best.

But…

'Given the nature of Beast-Humans, if such an incident occurs, attention will naturally be drawn to the Beast-Human side.'

It's a very unfair situation for them, but it can't be helped.

In reality, the physical difference is that they are much stronger, so if they forcibly try to overpower and kill someone, an ordinary person would have no way to stop them.

Being torn to pieces by that overwhelming power is only natural.

And…

"But they deny the incident. They say they don't have relationships with other races."

Yes, that's it.

They do not have relationships with other races.

If there were just torn corpses, there would be no choice but to suspect the Matimos Tribe, but if nothing else, that was certain.

Unless I'm misremembering, that was a setting about them that appeared in the actual setting book.

The only problem is that the fact is irrelevant to the villagers.

"[Efforts to find the culprit internally...]"

"They say they are doing it for now, but..."

Valencia shook her head.

The Matimos Tribe have lived as a minority for a long time.

In a way, it is only natural that they tend to protect their own people in such incidents.

Especially if they are on the side of the relatively small and weak.

Therefore…

'It's definitely not them.'

The Matimos Tribe are definitely not the culprits.

There's no way.

Even though they seem that way, they worship Solanis, the God of Purification.

They can't commit such acts.

If they did, they would have lost that power of purification.

If they thought they would commit such a heinous act themselves and actually acted on it, they would lose the Holy Power they possess just by doing that.

The culprit will be revealed soon.

Besides…

'Rape?'

As I said before, this part is from the setting book, so there's no room for error.

In other words,

Either there is a culprit who actually committed such an act,

'Or they forced the Matimos Tribe to act that way...'

Like a Mental Assault...

Mental Assault...?

Ah…!

'Could it be…!'

I suddenly thought of one possibility.

'Succubus Queen…!!'

I gritted my teeth.

Yes, if that bitch intervened in this situation, everything would make sense.

Of course, she was supposed to appear soon, but I didn't expect the world to flow this way.

I think I saw this vicious method in the story, but it was so long ago that I don't remember it well.

Besides, it was even harder to recall because the timing was different.

'She's not supposed to appear at this time, but she did…?'

As expected, I completely twisted the story, so this much error occurred.

Well, it's a fact that doesn't matter anymore, but if it has changed this much, it seems right to use the knowledge of the future only for reference.

I've already given up on it since it seems useless anyway.

I have no doubt that this group can overcome it even without knowledge of such stories.

However…

'Even with Valencia, this is dangerous...'

The Succubus Queen's close combat, that is, her inherent power, is at the lowest level, even if she is a high-ranking executive.

If she fought Valencia in close combat, she would be split in half and die in a few moves.

But the really scary thing about that bitch is something else.

'Mental Assault...'

She is skilled in all kinds of Mental Assault, including Temptation, Charm, and Mental Confusion.

This is the biggest problem.

If I were to choose the most difficult opponent in this game, I would definitely choose the Succubus Queen.

Until now, the executives and enemies have attacked mainly with physical damage and magic damage, so all you had to do was increase physical defense and magic resistance.

But this bitch is different.

You had to have high Mental Power, of all things.

If this stat is low, each attack is an instant kill pattern, so you have to avoid them all.

Fortunately, the instant kill pattern attacks are non-targeting attacks, so you can avoid them if you know the patterns.

It's just that avoiding them is too difficult...

'But this isn't a game...'

The idea of avoiding it with physical skills should be virtually abandoned.

At some point, your companions may be dominated by Mental Control, Hallucination, or Temptation and change.

'Evan might be affected too...'

His Mental Defense is very high, but it doesn't mean he won't be affected.

The same goes for Valencia.

Even Valencia, who is at the level of a Sword Master, and Evan, the Hero, are affected, so there is no way that even the Matimos Tribe, who worship Solanis, can stop it.

The traces of the corpses that were raped and brutally murdered are likely the work of the Succubus Queen.

However, there was one problem.

'I can't tell them...'

Aside from not even knowing if it was the Succubus Queen's doing in the first place, I can't arbitrarily conclude anything without even properly figuring out who did it.

The moment I bring up this story, the way they look at me will definitely become strange.

The story about the Trial can be passed off as a Divine Revelation or the Goddess's guidance, but there's no way the God would tell me that the Succubus Queen committed such an act.

So, for now…

'I have no choice but to take a bit of a dangerous gamble.'

It's not like I don't have anything to rely on.

I smiled, thinking of the Relic in my arms.

Even though it's dangerous, if I think about what is the safest way to lure her out and deal with her, there is no better way than this.

Of course, I can't tell them about this plan, so for now…

"[How about going to the village first?]"

It would be good to go to the village and find out more details.

That was the best I could do right now.

The place they all arrived at was Elgar Village.

'It looks like it was built haphazardly.'

Is it just my imagination?

Anyway… right now, it was more important to investigate the events that had occurred in the village than that.

"It's very chaotic..."

Uriel said in a pitiful voice.

Evan also seemed to feel that the atmosphere of the village was not very good.

I can't feel the atmosphere of the village because I lack sight and hearing, which account for most of my five senses, but I can tell how scared and anxious the villagers are just by the Thought-form I hear.

'It's very serious.'

Everyone may not have seen the state of the corpses, but…

Just by looking at the Thought-form I hear, I can easily tell how serious the situation is.

The atmosphere is chaotic, but no one is trying to come outside.

"[First of all, it would be best to find someone who knows the incident well.]"

It's not like I remember all the NPCs, so how would I know?

Actually, the word NPC is wrong, but anyway.

Whoever it is, I'll be able to find them soon by reverse-tracking these overflowing Thought-form one by one.

…

Probably… that's right…

Um…

3 - Conflict

After several hours of searching, they finally found the man consumed by hatred after losing his wife.

It wasn't difficult to find him.

Simply passing by him sent shivers down their spines with the overwhelming feeling of hatred; it would have been stranger not to notice.

Especially since it was directed at the Matimos Tribe.

Judging by the intensity of his emotions, it seemed like he would cause trouble soon, so they quickly went inside to stop him…

"…"

Aria shook her head with a sad expression, as if answering the man's words.

"Even with your power… is it impossible…?"

Then, the man asked her with a strained voice.

Yes.

It was impossible even with her power.

In the first place, reviving a corpse was only possible if the corpse remained… How could she revive someone from a place where not even a trace of them remained, torn to shreds?

To revive a corpse that had vanished without a trace, their soul had to still be present in that place.

Otherwise, it was impossible.

But to revive a corpse so horribly mangled that it was unrecognizable, a corpse that had been dead for quite some time, was impossible even for her.

'Her heart aches to revive her, but…'

The thought of the pain made her shudder, and she wanted to revive her for the man's sake, but the situation was such that she couldn't even attempt it, so there was no way.

Aria lowered her head and said.

“[Please… tell me what you know so that we can honor her spirit. I beg you.]”

The man's hatred for the Matimos Tribe hadn't disappeared, but thanks to her efforts, his expression had softened, and he nodded.

“I don't know much… but if it can be of any help, I'll tell you anything.”

Perhaps it was thanks to the image she had built up in the Demon Realm, but fortunately, the man began to tell them everything he knew.

It seemed like things were going well, but she didn't know whether to call it fortunate yet…

The story they heard from the man was shocking.

When he returned home from work, it was already very late. The first thing he saw when he entered the room was the chaotic state of the house.

There were signs of destruction and tearing everywhere, furniture and the floor stained with blood, and at the end of it all, a gruesome corpse filled with blood and flesh.

And only traces of carnal acts remained.

“I only knew it was my wife when I saw the pendant in the blood… *sob*… *sniff*…”

The man clutched his head with both hands, holding the pendant in one hand, and wept.

Everyone watched the man with pity.

'…With this much, it's understandable to suspect the Matimos Tribe…'

They couldn't leave the corpse there, so they had already cleaned everything up, but the nightmare would continue to replay in his eyes.

Perhaps he was suffering just by being in this house.

It was understandable to be suspicious.

Of course, rationally, he might know that they wouldn't commit such acts, that it was their culture not to engage with other races.

Of course, that was only what they claimed, and it was up to him to believe it or not, but in reality, that was the case, so he had no choice but to believe it.

But in any case, the Matimos Tribe were the only ones with the physical capabilities to commit such an act.

In the end, he had no choice but to suspect the Matimos Tribe.

“Saintess…!”

The man approached Aria and knelt.

Clutching the pendant soaked in hardened blood with trembling hands, the man looked at her with a face burning with hatred and said.

“Please… please make those bastards pay for their sins! I beg you…! Please…!!”

It was complicated to see him grabbing her sleeve, who was much younger than him, and saying such things.

She had never had someone she loved so much, so it was difficult to fully empathize with his feelings, but…

'How precious must she have been for him to be like this.'

At least she could understand that much.

What it would be like if someone precious died.

'If Evan were to die…'

Aria briefly imagined Evan dying.

Actually, it wasn't something she could easily imagine…

'Ah…'

As the image of Evan dying came to mind, a sigh escaped her lips.

Hmm.

It didn't feel good to imagine it.

No, it was starting to make her feel bad.

"…"

She couldn't fully understand, but she could understand to some extent what he was feeling.

So…

"[…Yes. I will definitely catch the culprit.]"

Making the one who killed his wife pay for their sins was probably not something she could do.

But…

'I can make the cause of this pay for their sins.'

If that cause hadn't existed in the first place, this wouldn't have happened, so it was the same as finding the culprit and making them pay.

Besides, they were already a target they had to subjugate anyway, so it would be killing two birds with one stone.

“Ah…”

The man looked up at her with a moved expression and then lowered his head deeply.

“Thank you… thank you so much…”

And then he thanked her repeatedly, sincerely.

For a long time…

“That's too much…”

Uriel muttered with a sad expression.

It seemed like she had said that before, but she was saying it again, so the story from earlier must have been very sad for her.

Well, it was a sad story even for Aria, so it must have been even more so for Uriel.

'Succubus Queen…'

In fact, the Succubus Queen probably hadn't ordered the victim to be killed so brutally.

If she had intended to get involved to that extent, traces of her power would have remained to the point where it wouldn't have been strange for Aria to track her down immediately.

But right now, there were no traces left.

In other words, she hadn't used that much power.

'Considering it was a Beast-Human, maybe…'

She had simply manipulated his mind to rape a human, but that was it.

There was no way a normal person could withstand the assault of a Matimos Tribe's strong body.

Thinking about it that way, the gruesome corpse wasn't incomprehensible.

Then there was only one thing left.

'Why on earth did they do this…'

What benefit was there in making the Matimos Tribe and the residents of this place get along worse, to the point of taking direct action like this?

'It's because it's me that I figured it out.'

If it wasn't for her, the case would probably have been lost in the fog.

She had concealed her power that thoroughly.

Then…

'Could it be…'

Was it their intention to lure them to the village?

'…I don't know yet, but…'

Since they had to go to the Trial of Courage anyway, staying here was essential.

If it was a grand scheme to lure them to the village, then she would be moving as she expected, and if nothing happened overnight, she could

assume that her prediction was wrong.

If possible…

'I have no choice but to hope that my prediction is correct.'

It would be good to secretly prepare to catch them.

Aria habitually poured Holy Power into the Relic.

But…

'Purification Holy Power.'

She poured the Holy Power of Purification into all the Relics.

In fact, the way to use Relics was to put in each of their respective Holy Powers, or the original Holy Power that was generally not separated, but…

'It's different now…'

She completely understood how to use the Relics.

There was a separate technique that could be used when all the Relics were gathered.

She was thinking of using that.

“It's already getting dark…”

“Trial of Courage… we couldn't find it after all.”

At Uriel's words, Aria smiled awkwardly and said.

“[Why don't we stay here for a day and go back?]”

“Saintess?”

Valencia seemed taken aback, as if she didn't expect her to say such a thing.

Even she thought it wasn't something she would say, but she felt like they had to stay here today.

“[Is that not okay…?]”

When she sent a Thought-form with a slightly pleading tone, Valencia made a genuinely flustered expression.

Um… was that too much?

Evan also looked at her with a dumbfounded expression, but soon he seemed to guess that there was a reason why she was acting like this, and he turned to Valencia and said.

“If Aria is saying it to this extent… I think there's something going on. I'm asking you.”

“…I… I understand… I will do so, Saintess.”

Embarrassing.

Aria couldn't bring herself to look up and answered with a faint Thought-form, thanking her.

If she had known it would be like this, it might have been better to just say nonchalantly that she wanted to spend a day here.

She was sad…

4 - Conflict

In the end, we ended up spending the night outside.

Should I be relieved that things are going as planned? I was worried because I insisted on this, thinking that I wouldn't get another easy chance to catch the Succubus Queen if not now.

More than anything…

'I don't know if he'll be okay without even going through the Trial of Courage…'

That was one of my biggest concerns.

If Evan had to face the Succubus Queen without even completing the Trial of Courage… even Evan could be affected by Mental Assault.

The experience points from the Trial were quite high.

I was sure that the difference between having that experience and not having it would be significant.

But…

'It's too good of an opportunity…'

Originally, the Succubus Queen was a strategist among the executives.

That's why she rarely showed herself. Despite that, she was incredibly difficult to catch, so it wasn't for nothing that the story was set up for us to catch her at this time.

There was no way to lure her out except for now, when it might seem like an opportunity to secretly sabotage us without being noticed.

The problem is that if we don't subjugate her, she'll use her terrifying Mental Manipulation to lead not only our party but the entire world to ruin.

'It's difficult…'

In fact, I wasn't even sure if she would take the bait.

Even if I wasn't sure if we could deal with her definitively once she took the bait… at least we would definitely get a chance.

It's never easy to get a chance to face and subjugate the Succubus Queen, who is difficult to even meet in the first place.

In that sense, it was too good of an opportunity.

'For now, I have no choice but to rely on Evan and Valencia.'

I can weaken her by using the Relic, but that's it.

In the end, if Evan's mental strength can't overcome the Succubus Queen, she could take him over, and the world could be destroyed.

Valencia is here too, but Valencia alone can't catch the Succubus Queen.

No matter how strong he is, it won't be easy to fight while blocking the Mental Assault of someone like the Succubus Queen.

In a one-on-one fight, she could use Mental Assault while also attacking physically, and Valencia would have no chance.

She's a vicious opponent who inflicts debuffs on opponents of similar caliber.

But if Evan is there, if she uses Mental Assault on Evan, Valencia will go wild, and if she uses it on Valencia, the opposite will happen.

Either way, it's difficult to deal with, so she can force a meaningless either-or choice.

It was a so-called high-risk, high-return situation.

Stella hasn't awakened as an Archmage yet, and Uriel is in a better situation than Stella, but still weaker than Evan.

'Is it right to mess with her now…'

Even if we don't mess with her now, we'll meet her someday.

If we think about it in terms of the story.

But…

'This world is already too twisted from what I knew…'

The Succubus Queen, who should be infiltrating the academy as a student and gradually collapsing it from within, is here, causing rifts between the Matimos Tribe and humans.

I don't know her exact intentions, but she was probably planning to seduce Valencia, the Sword Master.

It makes sense if I think about it that way.

In other words, she must have judged that attacking the academy and subduing or killing the Hero was too risky, so she targeted Valencia.

Or…

'She might have lured us here.'

More precisely, she lured me here.

Since I've spent many years in the Demon Realm, the fact that I have a strong bond with Valencia and the soldiers of the Northern Demon Realm is a famous story, to the point where a statue of us is erected in the center of the Empire.

In other words, she most likely thought that if something big happened in the North, I would come here alone and did this.

'If that's the case, I'll have to fall for it.'

She must have set up a trap for me.

I should also set up a trap for her.

I wouldn't normally take such a gamble…

'I have to subjugate the Succubus Queen at this opportunity…'

In the end, if we don't subjugate her, subjugating the Demon King is a distant dream.

Especially since the Succubus Queen is the only executive left now.

Let's see… who will win.

.

.

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The place we arrived at was a relatively luxurious inn in the village.

Of course, I didn't see anything luxurious, just that it was a pretty spacious inn.

“…Are you really going to be okay?”

“[Yes, this is better.]”

“But…”

Valencia looked at me as if worried.

But after seeing my determined expression, he sighed as if he couldn't help it.

“…Come here, Evan.”

Valencia called Evan.

Evan, looking questioning, approached, and Valencia whispered something in his ear, Evan's expression turning to shock.

'Huh.'

What did he say to make him react like that?

I was curious, but he didn't seem to want to tell me.

Too bad.

Anyway… I know to some extent why Evan is reacting like that.

“[So, we're spending the night together, Evan.]”

“Y-Yeah…”

Because I'm sharing a room with Evan.

And it's at my request.

'It's a way to lure out the Succubus Queen.'

I have a plan for this.

Evan is the Hero, and I am the Saintess.

Of course, you might say that Evan is more likely to be scared and not approach because I'm the Saintess.

It's a little different.

The Succubus Queen has many abilities besides directly confronting and messing with minds.

That's why she's such a difficult opponent to catch.

Even with me, the Saintess, it won't be easy to prevent her from using Charm and other Mental Assaults.

It would be difficult and not very rewarding to use such Mental Assaults on me.

It might be possible to mess with my mind and make me unable to function…

No, even that would be impossible.

I'm confident that I can enjoy even that.

'I'm actually curious.'

I'm curious about how mental pain will affect me.

But given the Succubus Queen's nature, she's more likely to mess with Evan than me, who would be like stirring up a hornet's nest.

Even though he's about to undergo his final awakening, he's still the most vulnerable when he's off guard, and he's the second strongest in combat after Valencia.

It will be difficult to stop her.

That's why we need the Relic now more than ever.

'I need to seize the opportunity…'

To counterattack and subjugate the Succubus Queen, who will come in when we're off guard.

To that end, it was essential to sleep in the same room as Evan.

“A-Are you really going to be okay…?”

Evan and I, who had already entered the room, were standing in front of the bed.

“[Shall I use Purification magic on you?]”

“I-It's okay. I just feel like I want to wash… Aria, do you want to go first?”

“[No, Evan, you can go first. Purification magic is enough for me.]”

Evan nodded with a bewildered expression and walked towards the bathroom, disappearing inside.

Watching him, I shouted 'Nice' in my mind.

'While he's inside washing, I should prepare to face the Succubus Queen here…'

If you're at a certain level, especially since Holy Power and Demonic energy are opposing forces, you can sense them much better.

But unfortunately for the Succubus Queen, she can't sense what's inside the Relic, and I can also use magic using Holy Power… so-called Holy magic, with magic circles.

If I draw that magic circle, even the Succubus Queen won't be able to figure it out unless I'm pushing Holy Power into it to activate it.

In other words, it's possible to create a complete trap.

'Top-tier Purification magic… and Barrier magic to prevent her from escaping… and finally, using the Relic to purify Evan's mind should be the goal.'

If this plan succeeds, we can catch the Succubus Queen for sure without anyone getting hurt…

'No one gets hurt, huh…'

That's a method I would never have considered in the past.

Why is that?

There have been times recently when I've felt like I'm changing.

Even right now, I'm prioritizing saving someone over the pleasure I get from pain.

I chuckled to myself.

It's amazing, but I don't have time to worry about that now.

I had to finish things before Evan saw me.

It wouldn't be too late to worry about that after this is over.

Conflict (Interlude)

“Haa…”

Entering the bathroom, Evan sighed, his mind in turmoil.

How did things end up like this?

“S-Sleeping in the same room…”

The very idea of spending the night in the same room as the woman he loved was too much of a stimulation for Evan.

Especially since Aria was the worst kind of culprit.

‘Knowing that I like her…’

It was quite a while ago, but Evan had even declared to Aria that he would confess after defeating the Demon King.

Of course, even if Aria had no experience in that area, she would have noticed that he liked her a long time ago.

But whether she noticed or not, she was asking to sleep in the same room in this situation, so Evan couldn't help but be confused.

Especially after seeing the traces of that gruesome corpse just a while ago, and hearing that story.

‘Aria must have a reason, though…’

No matter how important the situation, it was still sleeping with the person he loved.

And in a place where there was only one bed.

No matter how much of a Hero he was, his heart couldn't help but waver.

‘I shouldn’t waver in this situation…’

Evan sighed and regained his composure.

He would have been happy if this was a peaceful situation without any incidents, but this was a place where a person had died in a gruesome state.

This was a real situation.

Not being able to control his desires like this…

- Really?

“…?”

- Are you just going to suppress that feeling? At this best opportunity?

A voice from within his heart.

Why was that?

Normally, Evan would have sensed something was wrong, but for some reason, he didn't suspect the voice.

Instead, he felt an unknown urge to hear more.

‘But… I’m the Hero… I shouldn’t have such thoughts…’

- No. The Hero is also a person, isn't he? He can have such feelings for the person he loves.

‘…’

Evan nodded at the voice's words without realizing it.

Come to think of it, that was true.

How long was he supposed to endure?

Until he defeated the Demon King?

He didn't even know when he would have to face the Demon King, and he wasn't even sure if he could win against him in the first place.

But telling him to endure until he defeated the Demon King was practically the same as telling him not to have such thoughts at all.

- That's right. They're just bad people who are only thinking of using you, the Hero.

“That’s…”

Evan shook his head.

No, that wasn't true.

Aria wasn't that kind of person.

This voice, something’s wrong…

- Ah, of course, you have to exclude the girl you like. She's such a kind girl. Right?

“… Yeah, that’s right…”

Aria was kind.

Too kind.

She was such a good person that she would sacrifice her own body to save the life of a complete stranger, without even caring about her own suffering.

He had been helped by her countless times.

Wouldn't it be stranger not to like her?

He couldn't help but like her.

- That's right, that's right. She's a kind girl. Even if you go astray for a moment… she'll definitely forgive you.

“Forgive… me…?”

- Of course. You're the Hero, and she's the Saintess, right? You have a deeper connection than anyone else… she'll forgive you for that much.

“Is that so…?”

She would forgive him.

Yes, no matter what he did…

No… what did he mean by…

What…?

“Doing bad things… is not allowed…”

- Is it a bad thing to share affection with the person you love? Then is having children a sin?

“That’s…”

Evan couldn't answer easily.

He grabbed his head with both hands and shook it back and forth.

Something was wrong.

Something was strange.

Something… something…

A seductive voice reached Evan's ears as he tried to regain his senses.

Hoo, it said. A pleasant sensation spread from his ear.

- Don't hold back. That girl… will accept your desires too…

The last word.

At that word, the light disappeared from Evan's eyes.

“Ah…”

The strange one was me.

Evan got up from his spot.

“[Purification magic is really convenient…]”

There was no need to bother going to wash up; you could just use purification magic and your body would be clean right away.

Of course, it was nice to soak in warm water and enjoy the pleasant sensation, but when I was lazy, there was no better method.

Evan wasn't here either. I was lying on the bed, wiggling my arms and legs like a child, giggling, when I suddenly felt Evan coming out of the bathroom.

‘Is he already out?’

How long had it been since he went in to wash up that he was already out?

I was a little doubtful, but I decided that everyone had different washing times, so I would just accept it.

I wanted to lie on the bed a little longer and feel the soft sensation, but it was a pity…

‘Wait.’

Something was wrong.

Evan's footsteps seemed to be staggering.

At that moment,

With a click, the door opened and Evan appeared.

He was definitely the usual Evan, but something was off.

He had a dazed expression.

“Aria…”

Evan's Thought-form reached me.

‘I want to make Aria mine…’

‘Aria would understand, right…?’

‘I’ve endured a lot…’

‘Aria… will accept my desires…’

‘How long do I have to wait until I defeat the Demon King…?’

‘I don’t want to wait…’

‘I want to be connected with Aria.’

Countless Thought-forms.

Most of them were lust for me.

A sticky desire to pounce on me.

‘Wait…’

The moment Evan tried to pounce on me.

I immediately realized that Evan had been affected by the Succubus Queen.

I was about to take out the Relic from my bosom, but Evan must have thought I was trying to escape, because he reached me in an instant with incredible speed, grabbed both of my wrists, and pinned me down.

“[Ugh…]”

With both wrists grabbed and pinned to the bed, I couldn't take out the Relic and was captured.

“Haa… haa…”

I could see that Evan was excited.

I didn't know if he had lost his mind or not, but just feeling the sticky desire for me, I knew that he had been properly affected by the Succubus Queen.

“Aria… Ariaaa…!!”

Tear!

As if he were a beast trying to devour my body, Evan buried his face in my neck.

Evan's breath flowed from my neck, sending shivers down my spine.

‘W-Wait a minute…’

Why is he so strong…!!

Crackle!

In the end, my clothes couldn't withstand it and were torn.

I was wearing thin clothes just before going to bed, so Evan tore them easily with just a little force, and my upper body was exposed in an instant.

Since it was a dress, if the upper body was torn, it would be completely naked if I pulled it down.

“[E-Evan…!]”

This guy must have really lost his mind.

However, I didn't feel particularly repulsed.

If I could see it directly, I might have felt scared, but to me, it just looked like a 3D model doing something or other.

The problem was that the target was me.

“Ah, aah…”

Evan's eyes trembled for a moment when he saw my exposed upper body.

It's not for me to say, but I don't have much to see since my chest is small.

Regardless, that was irrelevant to Evan, who had already lost his mind.

‘Sorry, but…’

I don't want to be attacked like this in a place where the Succubus Queen is watching.

“[P-Please… come to your senses… Evan…! Don’t give in…!!]”

I desperately called out to Evan, hoping he would come to his senses, but it seemed that my voice didn't reach him because he was already properly Charmed.

‘I just need to free my restrained arms…!’

Succubus Queen, you have a really bad taste…

If I used Holy Power here, the Succubus Queen would sense something was wrong and run away.

So I had to create an opening for Evan without using Purification.

‘Judging from his reaction just now, he’s not completely without reason…’

Then…

I swallowed hard.

The time had come to show off my acting skills at least at the level of a Best Actor award.

I tried to move the arm that was holding my wrist tightly, in the most pitiful posture possible.

“[Evan… please… come to your senses… sob…]”

As I continued to pretend to cry with sincere Thought-form, trying to shake him off, the strength in his hand began to weaken little by little.

This was it.

This would work.

“This is… Aria… you’re… bad…”

“[This kind of thing… this kind of thing is not allowed, Evan…]”

I tried to persuade Evan with sobbing Thought-form.

Just a moment, a very short moment would be enough.

Please…!

"I, I am…"

It worked…!

Taking advantage of the moment when his strength was completely gone, I quickly shook off his hand and immediately took out the Relic and used the

Relic of Purification on Evan.

Flash!

“Ugh…!!”

Light poured out from the Relic of Purification, and Evan, who had been Charmed, slowly returned to normal.

And,

‘Now’s the time…!’

I let the Holy Power flowing from the Relic of Purification flow onto the floor at a speed that the Succubus Queen couldn't react to, activating the Holy Magic Circle.

It seemed that she didn't know because the priests these days hardly used it.

- T-This is…!

A chilling voice that even I could hear.

Ah, I caught you, you bitch.

Welcome… to my 『Unique Barrier』.

You’re dead, you fucking bitch.

1 - Succubus Queen

"..."

If I called it a Unique Barrier... that might be a bit much, so let's just call it a top-tier Barrier.

In any case, the fact that I'm dragging her into a subspace of vast Holy Power remains unchanged.

'Holy Power, you guzzle it down like crazy.'

Since it's a Saintess technique that creates a unique subspace with Holy Power in the first place, it's only natural that it consumes a lot of Holy Power.

It's basically using Saintess Domain Deployment in the form of a Barrier.

"[Evan... are you okay?]"

Ah.

Come to think of it, my clothes don't return to normal, do they?

I grabbed the torn clothes with one hand, barely covering the important parts, and called out to Evan.

Evan barely regained his senses, but...

'Ah, damn it.'

Didn't think of this.

"Aria... what, what am I..."

Evan was trembling with both hands, seemingly shocked by the fact that he had tried to assault me, and was consumed by guilt.

'Oh, Evan...'

Come on... a man can be a little charmed by a Succubus's Charm and try to pounce.

Even though my clothes are all torn, it ended in an attempt anyway, so why is he reacting so excessively?

Anyway, he becomes a scaredy-cat when it comes to things related to me.

I guess I have no choice.

I approached Evan.

In times like these, shock therapy is the best.

Thwack!

Without hesitation, I raised my hand and slapped Evan's cheek.

Since it was me, who is no different from an ordinary person, hitting him, Evan's head only turned slightly, and the hit area didn't even turn red.

However, the shock was still there, so Evan, who had been blaming himself, stopped dead in his tracks.

"[Get a grip, Evan!]"

I strongly sent out a Thought-form.

This is really good.

I can send out Thought-forms as I please, so I can send them out loudly even if I don't shout.

To Evan, it seems like I'm angry.

"A, Aria..."

"[Let's talk about this later. Right now, more than that...]"

Before I could finish speaking, a chilling voice was heard from afar.

- H, how did this happen... Where, where am I...!

I immediately recognized who the voice belonged to.

Evan did too.

"That voice... the voice that spoke to me just now...!"

"[Evan?]"

"It was you... it was you...!"

Evan gritted his teeth and ran towards the direction of the voice.

And there...

"Damn it... this was a trap...?! I was going to enjoy a good show for once...!! Ugh, damn it...!!"

Bat-like wings attached to an ambiguous location that could be either the butt or the waist.

Horns that protrude in a beautiful shape that seems to suck you in just by looking at them.

A face that feels beautiful even though it's a 3D model.

'It's the Succubus Queen.'

There was the Succubus Queen, wailing as if she was so upset about losing to me in intelligence.

Is she that upset...?

"Hmph, well... since things have turned out this way, there's no helping it."

Just when I thought she was despairing alone, she suddenly calmed down and turned to look at us.

"I lost, Saintess. To think you knew I was coming in advance."

Oh yeah, well...

In fact, her plan was perfect.

She could cause conflict between the Matimos Tribe and the people of the North, making Valencia pay attention to that side, and also lure me, who has a close relationship with the North.

If I hadn't known anything... I would have been assaulted by Evan, who suddenly turned strange, without knowing why.

Who would have thought that the fact that he suddenly went crazy and tried to assault me was actually related to the Succubus Queen?

Moreover, she even set up this trap in advance to catch the Succubus Queen.

Since it was a task that consumed quite a bit of my Holy Power, it was impossible for the Succubus Queen to escape from this place on her own.

Then shall I completely cut off the last possibility?

"[If you have this, you can resist mental attacks.]"

I said that and handed the Relic of Purification to Evan.

Even if I get caught, it won't cause much damage to Evan, so there's no problem.

Just because the Succubus Queen manipulates me doesn't mean she can use Saintess techniques at will.

In other words, it's a checkmate situation.

But why is that?

"Heh..."

The Succubus Queen was smiling.

"Pfft, Pwahahaha!"

And then she burst into laughter.

"Don't tell me... you thought I would lose?"

The Succubus Queen asked, resting her chin on her hand.

Yeah.

I completely think you're going to lose.

How are you going to win?

Even if you fight Evan one-on-one in a physical fight, it's questionable whether you'll win, and I'm here too.

By handing over the Relic of Purification, no more mental attacks will work on Evan.

Even if you catch me, I'm just an ordinary woman with nowhere to use it.

Ah, an "immortal" ordinary woman, that is.

I sneered at the Succubus Queen in my mind.

So what are you going to do?

What can you do...

Suddenly.

'Eh.'

Oh.

My body isn't moving...?

'Oh.'

W, wait a minute.

The strength I was giving to my arm suddenly released, and the pajamas I was barely holding onto fell down.

'Oh, shit...?'

I became completely naked.

"...!!"

Evan's eyes widened, and he quickly turned his head away.

"Oh my, is it because the opponent is a Saintess? It's more difficult than I thought."

The Succubus Queen said with exhausted Thought-form.

"What did you do...?"

"Hmm? Can't you tell? A Hero should be able to tell."

Ah.

No way, right?

Hey, hey.

Hey, damn it, wait a minute.

Stop it!!!

'No, you crazy...'

"Generally, lewd things, you know? It's not just the man who pounces..."

"Evan...♡"

"Sometimes the woman takes the lead, you know?"

My mouth is moving on its own.

I don't even know what I'm saying.

The only thing I can tell is that I'm using the common language of the continent.

I can't hear, so there's no way my mouth is saying things that are being heard through Thought-form.

I hurriedly tried to use Purification magic, but the opponent is the Succubus Queen, who is of a higher rank than me.

Confining her in a Barrier was possible by surpassing the rank with the Saintess magic circle, but Purification magic wasn't.

'Ugh, grrr...'

I, I can't do anything...!!

"A, Aria...!"

Ah, no, my body is moving on its own!

"Well, how is it? Isn't it a spectacular view?"

The Succubus Queen laughed, "Uhehe."

That, that damn bitch, really...!!

I was directly experiencing myself taking a pose to Charm Evan while completely naked, so I felt like my intestines were twisting.

Please... don't look...

"..."

Evan was just silently averting his gaze.

Perhaps he also realized that I was using that bitch's mental attack, to be exact, the technique of only taking control of the body, but there was no other way.

Anyway, it's a body with nothing to see, so if he had looked, I would have hit him for staring.

It's impossible now, though.

"Hmph, how boring."

The Succubus Queen, who said it was boring as if she wanted me to pounce right away, moved my body.

She ran straight at Evan.

Evan was briefly surprised, but then his eyes widened.

"Ehehe... I love you...♡"

I smiled like a girl and clung to Evan's arm.

'Aaaargh, damn it!!'

My image!

My imageeeeee!!!

"W, what do you think you're going to do by doing this..."

"What else, this."

The Succubus Queen, who had somehow approached Evan, smiled wickedly and swung a sword filled with Demonic energy.

Slash!

Evan, who picked up my body and barely dodged, gasped, "Kuh."

"I wonder how long you can fight while carrying that child? Uhehe..."

At the Succubus Queen's words, Evan, and I as well...

Realized why the Succubus Queen had taken control of my body.

"Still, a Saintess is a Saintess, I guess? It's a little, no, a lot difficult to move at will and attack at the same time... but still, this is enough to fight."

The Succubus Queen licked her lips.

It won't last long, but she laughed, "Hehe," saying that she just needs to decide the outcome before that.

That's right.

'Wow, I really couldn't have imagined it...!!'

The Succubus Queen was using me as a sacrifice to hinder Evan.

She has to hold on so that it's difficult to move, and at the same time, she has to dodge so that she doesn't get attacked.

Even in the midst of that, I'm not being dragged around, but I'm even sticking close to Evan.

The person you like is naked, and keeps acting cute.

While the person you like is being controlled and acting cute while naked, you have to protect the person who is acting cute while simultaneously

facing an opponent of a similar level.

Truly...

It truly is a Succubus-like way of fighting...!!

'But why does it have to be me!!'

Clang! Clang!

"Kuh... damn it...!!"

Evan is breathing roughly.

It seemed difficult for him to protect me from being attacked while enduring my interference and facing the Succubus Queen.

Besides, the Holy Sword is originally meant to be held with both hands, so it must be even more difficult to fight with one hand.

'Relic... please use the Relic...!!'

He seemed to be hesitant to return the Relic he had hung around his neck, thinking that he would be subjected to mental attacks if he handed the Relic over to me.

That's right, but...

That's right, but...!!

"Aah♡"

Because I was clinging to Evan's arm while naked, I accidentally brushed between his thighs as I moved around, and the Succubus Queen, not missing that, moved my mouth to let out a moan.

That, that damn crazy bitch, really!!

'Aah...'

Please save me, Evan.

I was wrong.

It's the first time since coming to this world that I want to give up on everything.

I'm embarrassed.

I'm so embarrassed I'm going crazy.

'Sniff... Hwaaa...'

I cried inwardly.

I want to go home...

2 - Succubus Queen

Evan, trying to compose his complicated feelings, looked at Aria, who was clinging to his arm.

At first, Evan had been consumed by self-loathing, thinking he had tried to assault Aria.

What was he thinking when he committed such an act? His mind was a mess.

But when he learned that the Succubus Queen was the cause of it all, he felt relieved and deeply admired Aria.

It wasn't about the Succubus Queen being the culprit or how she had figured it out.

Even regarding the Trial, she knew things that not even the Dean or the being who introduced himself as the Guardian Dragon of Light knew.

Aria knew that the relevant information itself didn't exist, so suspecting her to this extent was absurd.

It was just that Evan… was genuinely relieved deep down.

He could attribute his attempt to assault Aria not to his own dirty desires, but to the Succubus Queen's mental attack, which was so powerful that even the Hero couldn't resist it.

Moreover, he had a chance to capture one of his arch-enemies, the Succubus Queen, and the opportunity was practically free, so he thought it was a complete victory for them.

If only the Succubus Queen hadn't been controlling Aria's body.

"How can this be…!!"

"How is it possible, you ask? Of course, it's normally impossible."

It would be impossible for Aria in her normal state.

But now was different.

"This Barrier… it's surpassed the level of Barrier that Saintess can handle."

Evan's eyes widened at that.

To deploy a Barrier, or a technique or magic, beyond one's own level required not only preparation but also tremendous power.

It was only natural, as it was creating a miracle that would otherwise be impossible.

Then…!

"You're not as dumb as you look…!"

The Succubus Queen shouted, wielding a greatsword filled with Demonic energy.

Evan pulled Aria into his arms, trying to protect her from being hit, but the diagonally swung greatsword grazed his arm.

"Ugh…!"

Evan groaned from the pain caused by the Demonic energy flowing in.

It wasn't easy to dodge with Aria clinging to him.

Of course, if he fought without considering Aria's safety, he could fight advantageously, though not easily, but unfortunately, that was impossible for Evan.

"Haa… I hate clingy men… If you keep running away, I'll have no choice."

The Succubus Queen lamented, licking the blood off the blade.

"Ew, disgusting."

"…"

It was the Hero's blood, so that was only natural.

When he stared at her with an absurd expression, she seemed embarrassed and swung her sword…

Clang!

"Ugh…"

Evan's clothes were slightly torn because he couldn't completely block the sharp wind pressure.

"What, what are you looking at! I can taste it if I'm curious!"

…

Was this woman actually stupid?

He briefly thought so, but Evan quickly shook his head.

"Evan… Ehehehe…♡"

For Evan, his priority right now was to figure out what to do with Aria, who was clinging to his arm and acting cute.

'But wait a minute.'

Come to think of it, isn't that woman acting cute right now?

Didn't she say she was controlling her?

Evan looked at the Succubus Queen with a lecherous expression.

"Why are you looking at me like that?"

"Somehow… thinking that you're doing this aegyo makes me feel sick."

"How rude! Seriously!"

The Succubus Queen lost her temper and stomped her foot on the floor, shouting.

Evan was a fortress of iron.

Of course, the Succubus Queen was an incredibly beautiful woman.

A beauty that anyone would fall head over heels for.

But Evan already had a woman in his heart.

Definitely, completely.

A woman he loved so passionately that nothing could shake him.

'… Still…'

Even though it wasn't the real Aria, he couldn't help but smile just seeing Aria like this.

Besides, how could he not be swayed when Aria, who usually didn't say anything, was acting cute with her real voice, not just a Thought-form?

In fact, he wanted to keep watching.

Aria's appearance was so seductive.

Even though she was being controlled, it was a sight he could never see in the usual Aria.

Although he could barely see her body because she was clinging to him, he might be able to see it if he turned his head a little…

"Heok…!"

Terrifying.

This was the Succubus's way of fighting…

Although she was saying it half-jokingly, it was a vicious tactic that Evan couldn't help but shudder at.

Since Evan was using a Relic of purification imbued with Holy Power, body control itself wouldn't work anyway.

It would be the best option for the Succubus Queen to put Aria in this situation and force him to choose.

'Such a cruel…!'

Evan gritted his teeth.

It was actually working on Evan.

He had worked hard to become stronger until this day, at this moment, only wishing for Aria to be unharmed and happy.

But the Succubus Queen was forcing him to deny that belief head-on.

To keep Aria from getting hurt, Evan himself would have to be injured.

But if he ignored Aria, Aria would get hurt.

Even though she would recover, he didn't want to cause her any pain.

"What should I do…!"

In a situation where he couldn't do anything, Estel shouted at Evan, who was gritting his teeth.

- Hey, you idiot!!

A voice that sounded very angry.

Evan looked down at his Holy Sword with a bewildered expression.

- You didn't forget, did you? How I used the Relic!

“…!!”

Evan's eyes widened.

That's right.

He remembered that there was a way to use the Relic separately from just holding it.

Remembering that fact, Evan immediately brought the Relic to the Holy Sword.

However,

'There's no reaction…?!'

There was no reaction coming back from the Relic.

- Ugh, what?! I can't take control of the Relic!

At that, Evan turned his head.

Aria.

There was a true owner of the Relic.

Could it be…

'Ah, because of Aria…?!'

Because Aria was clinging to him, he couldn't fuse the Holy Sword and the Relic…?!

"What are you doing?"

The Succubus Queen leisurely threw blades of wind around.

Not only that.

She was a being with strong power to be in the position of executive.

Even while laughing and mocking, she showed tremendous martial prowess and pressured him, causing Evan's expression to harden.

At this rate, he would really lose.

'I have to get Aria off me.'

And…

Evan turned his head again.

He noticed that the remaining Relics that had fallen to the floor when she had thrown off the clothes she had been holding onto while being body-controlled had all fallen to the floor.

'With that, even Aria…!'

With the Holy Power there, he could return Aria to normal even just a little.

Judging that, Evan tried to rush to get the Relics.

It was at that moment.

Aria, who had been clinging to Evan, suddenly froze.

"[E, van…]"

A small and faint but definitely audible Thought-form.

Aria's Thought-form.

"Aria! Are you okay?!"

"[I'm… okay… so hurry…]"

Aria's urgent Thought-form.

Hearing those words, Evan gritted his teeth.

He couldn't do that.

He had worked hard to become stronger to avoid seeing Aria suffer.

He couldn't ignore that to catch the Succubus Queen.

That was… like losing the meaning of all the strength he had gained so far.

He didn't want to give up his beliefs.

Thinking so, Evan judged that the only way to resolve this situation right now was with the Relic.

That's why he tried to approach the Relic, but Aria, who had broken free from his arms, grabbed Evan.

"Ugh, Aria…!"

Even while falling to the floor and being dragged along, she was preventing him from approaching the Relic.

"Oh my… I can't watch this anymore."

The Succubus Queen clicked her tongue and raised her arm.

Just as a magic of unknown origin was about to be activated, the Relic floated into the air.

"If I touch it, the Saintess I'm barely holding onto will be released… I should just throw it far away."

Feeling a sense of urgency at the Succubus Queen's attempt to throw it away as if dusting it off, Evan ignored Aria and jumped up.

"No…!"

Evan, who had managed to grab the Relic that was about to fly far away by jumping up with superhuman physical abilities,

"…"

Aria's body, which could not withstand the superhuman movement, could not withstand the force and floated into the air.

At that, the Succubus Queen burst into laughter.

"Puhahaha! Really, humans are…!"

And then muttered softly.

"So stupid."

The Succubus Queen said that and swung her sword.

Aria and Evan were in the air.

There was no way to avoid it.

However,

Swoosh.

The Succubus Queen's eyes widened.

And then shouted with a horrified expression.

"What…? What is this ridiculous…!"

The blade made of Demonic energy, which should have cut both of them, did not reach Evan.

"Huh…?"

What was dismembered was Aria's body.

As the small Barrier that had been deployed in the meantime was lightly broken, the weakened blade, whose direction had been twisted, grazed Evan's cheek.

"Aria?"

Evan's empty cry echoed.

3 - Succubus Queen

“…”

Evan stared blankly at Aria, who had been cut to pieces.

“She used a Barrier while under my control…?! That’s impossible…!!”

The Succubus Queen couldn’t believe what was happening.

Her plan had been completely ruined.

She had clearly acted wisely.

She had been suspicious when they stopped in this village for a day, but after hearing that they had come here to find the Trial of Courage, she changed her mind, thinking it was a definite opportunity. And indeed, the moment she tried to seize control of their minds, the hidden Holy Barrier activated.

Of course, one might think of her as a foolish Succubus who fell into a trap, but this trap would have no reason to exist unless someone knew from the start that the Succubus Queen was involved.

From the outside, it would only look like a conflict between humans and the Matimos Tribe.

That’s why she never suspected that her existence was being questioned.

But she was the best schemer among the Demon King Army executives, unmatched even within the Demon King Army.

The Succubus Queen, instantly devising her next plan, instinctively took control of the Saintess's body.

She had already used a lot of power to set the trap, so it was very easy to take control.

Just now, while slowly taking control of the Hero's mind, she had learned everything about what he thought of the Saintess.

Naturally, she realized that the Hero considered the Saintess a precious being, more than just a comrade, or even a lover.

That's why she took control of the Saintess's body instead of trying to control Evan's body, which was practically an adventure in itself.

She judged that if she appealed to him with her feminine charms and interfered with him, she would definitely have a chance to defeat him in one blow.

That was what she intended to make happen from the start.

The Saintess's body was like that of a young girl, an unripe fruit, but Evan cherished Aria, the Saintess herself, beyond such physical charms, which made it possible.

She couldn't understand it at all, but she placed her hopes on it anyway.

And it actually worked.

The Hero was too worried about the Saintess getting hurt to react properly, and he was busy blocking her attacks, even though he should have been overwhelmed by her skill. He deliberately made sure the Saintess was hit by her attacks, and the Hero was quickly torn to shreds.

Being quick-witted, she had long noticed that the Hero was trying to use the Relic to wipe her out, and she casually threw the Relic away, inducing him to jump.

And…

‘Humans are so stupid.’

As soon as he floated into the air, she moved her body to release the Hero from her grasp, aligning with the angle that led straight down.

Looking up at the naked girl falling helplessly, and the Hero who stopped in mid-air just before falling… the Succubus Queen laughed at him for sacrificing his own life for someone he cherished more than himself.

What could be more precious than one's own life?

Really… Heroes are all so stupid.

The Succubus Queen thought so and gathered power in her greatsword, unleashing a sword strike.

An angle that was impossible to avoid.

The Hero's skill was insufficient to gather power and block the sword strike that flew faster than the blink of an eye.

And to make it even harder to react, the Saintess even covered the sword strike with her body, so reviving the dead Hero would be impossible forever.

Even if he recovered, the Succubus Queen would have a Saintess doll that she could control as she pleased.

Perfect.

It was a perfect plan.

The Succubus Queen was certain.

This battle was her victory.

Even though she had fallen into a trap, she had no doubt that she would win.

“Eh…?”

The moment she saw the Saintess protecting her Hero by deflecting her sword strike with a Barrier, that belief shattered into pieces.

She thought it was absolutely impossible to block.

She never expected that she would use Holy Power to slightly twist the angle of the attack and save the Hero.

How could she use a Barrier even after she had taken control of her body?

Thud.

Aria's severed body fell to the floor.

Evan, who had landed on the ground, approached Aria with trembling steps.

“Aria…”

He was distracted by the Saintess.

“Die!”

The Succubus Queen thought this was her chance and unleashed another sword strike.

However,

Clang!

“What…?!”

The Succubus Queen was horrified to see her sword strike being deflected weakly.

There shouldn't have been such a difference in power.

Rumble.

Holy Power surged.

The earth was roaring.

“W-What is this… This is insane…!!”

The Succubus Queen hurriedly spread her wings and tried to fly away.

Once she was in the air, the Hero would have no other way to attack her, so she thought she could overcome this situation by making a new plan and moving again.

The Succubus Queen quickly left the ground and flew into the sky.

‘Yes…!’

If this was the case, she wouldn’t be attacked…

Swoosh!

Wha…?

“Ah…?”

She felt a slight pain in her wing.

Soon, the pain gradually increased, and she felt a burning sensation.

“Aaaaaah!”

It was burning.

Her wings were burning with holy light.

‘S-Solanis…?!’

Solanis’s Holy Power of the Sun.

That powerful sunlight was burning her wings.

The Succubus Queen looked at Evan with trembling eyes.

One point.

He poured Holy Power into a single point and fired it like a beam.

“You can’t escape.”

Evan said in a voice that was so chillingly devoid of emotion.

Then, he gathered Holy Power again and fired it.

There was no time to react.

Once the aiming was complete, the attack was carried out at the speed of light.

The Succubus Queen, whose other wing was pierced in an instant, could no longer stay in the sky.

“Aaaaaah!”

Evan raised Estel towards the Succubus Queen, who was falling down.

“[Divine Punishment]”

Evan declared and swung Estel down.

Soon,

Boom!!

A huge pillar of light pouring down from the sky crushed the Succubus Queen.

The Succubus Queen screamed, feeling the pain of her whole body melting in the barrage of the sun.

“Ugh… Ah…?”

The Succubus Queen, whose entire body had been literally burned by Holy Power, trembled on the floor, limp.

Sizzle.

Her arm was cut off.

“Ah, Aaaah…”

It was an unbelievable firepower.

How… How could he have such unbelievable power…

“How much pain did Aria have to endure?”

Sizzle.

“Kua…”

Her leg was also cut off.

Before she could get used to the pain, Evan attacked again.

“How much sadness did she feel?”

“…”

The Succubus Queen, whose limbs had all been cut off, no longer groaned.

She was dying.

“… Well, I don’t need to tell you this kind of story.”

Evan indifferently raised Estel.

Then, he slashed the Succubus Queen as it was.

“…”

Swoosh.

The Succubus Queen, split in half, disappeared as if melting away.

Soon, nothing remained in that place except for the scorched earth due to the effects of Divine Punishment.

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.

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Hmm…

I, who had fallen to the floor and been cut into five pieces, enjoyed the situation while feeling pleasure from the severed parts and munching on popcorn.

Seeing him enraged by my fallen appearance was something joyful and enjoyable to watch.

Why am I so happy?

…

Maybe it's because of the pain.

‘Why isn’t there any pain felt from the severed body parts?’

Is it because the nerves aren’t connected?

This is unnecessarily realistic.

With such a light heart, I was watching Evan overwhelm the Succubus Queen.

Our Evan is so cool.

He even saw my naked body and me acting cute, so isn't his wish fulfilled?

What a pervert.

‘What’s so good about my body that he reacts like that…’

He wouldn’t be a piece of trash who lusts after a body like this, would he…

He’s a strange guy…

Anyway, it seems that Evan was quite angry that I had become like this, and he properly vented his anger on the Succubus Queen.

However…

‘… It’s strange.’

She’s not the type to die so easily.

In the game, there was no existence as annoying and strong as that woman, so I was properly wary of her.

Of course, I had prepared everything to deal with her.

That’s why no matter how much I think about it, the suspicion doesn’t disappear.

‘It feels like it ended too easily…’

It feels like we defeated her too easily.

That’s what I’m thinking.

‘Could it be…’

No way.

I want to believe it’s not.

Yes, it’s not.

It has to be.

Otherwise…

‘… I think we’re in big trouble.’

Something really bad might happen.

4 - Succubus Queen

The Succubus Queen didn't fall.

It was a truth I really didn't want to believe, but I was certain of it.

No, I had no choice but to be certain.

Knowing how vicious of a boss she was, I knew very well that she wasn't the type to fall so easily.

I just didn't want to believe it.

"What should we do?"

Evan, who approached me, muttered with a helpless expression.

He's probably talking with Estel.

Unfortunately, I couldn't gather my body and revive on my own right now.

If I took my time, I would revive and move normally, but right now, I was being eroded by the Succubus Queen's powerful Demonic energy, making it impossible to properly utilize my Holy Power.

Still, it was fortunate that I could at least look around and hear Thought-forms, even if only faintly.

More importantly, it was crucial to inform them of the situation now.

"[Ev… Evan…]"

"Ah, Aria…!"

Ah.

I wanted to send a proper Thought-form.

Perhaps because of the Demonic energy rampaging inside my body, the Thought-form kept getting cut off.

In the meantime, Evan was looking down at me with a greatly worried expression, probably because I couldn't send a proper Thought-form and it was being sent in fragments.

'Ugh… it's nice, but…'

I'm fine.

I'm really fine.

In fact, an ordinary person would probably go crazy from the pain, but for me, this level of pain only brought pleasure…

Seeing him worry so much for me and trying to help in any way he could made me want to laugh.

What should I do?

Evan is too cute.

I almost felt disappointed that I couldn't feel the Demonic energy rampaging even in the severed parts.

That's because, among all the pain I've ever felt, there was no sensation as blissful as Demonic energy entering a body full of Holy Power and wreaking havoc.

It was just that it was difficult to send Thought-forms because of it.

I couldn't freely use my Holy Power…

'Oops…'

Come to think of it, now wasn't the time to enjoy this pleasant sensation.

I was satisfied enough with Evan's anger and the way he messed up the Succubus Queen when I was cut apart just now, so I should solve the problem first.

"[Listen… Evan… Succubus… Queen… alive…]"

"Aria? Aria!"

"[… Ugh… Ah…]"

Oh.

It's not sending.

Did I run out of Holy Power to even send Thought-forms?

I couldn't move my body, and I was even closing my eyes because I couldn't see.

I rolled my eyes while keeping them closed, thinking about the current situation.

'Wasn't I… naked?'

At first, I only felt embarrassed.

But thinking about it, there probably wasn't a more desperate situation for Evan than this.

The person he likes is naked, cut into pieces, and rolling around on the floor like trash, and there's no way to help.

'Um.'

I'm sorry I'm powerless, Evan…

But you know it's not my fault, right?

No matter what, letting go of my hands in mid-air and being cut apart like that wasn't my fault, but the Succubus Queen controlling my body manipulated it to let go at the exact timing, intending to slice me apart at the same time.

So it's really not my fault…

'Uh oh…'

The range of the surrounding space that I could see gradually began to shrink.

Holy Power itself remained, but most of it was being used to suppress the Demonic energy rampaging in my body, so the Holy Power I could use was as good as gone.

In the end, only Evan was barely visible.

'Ah… I am Aria. I'm disabled…'

Deaf and blind.

These were the things I had given up to gain such tremendous talent for Holy Power.

I thought it didn't matter back then because it was a game.

Surprisingly, I was grateful for these demerits.

If it weren't for these demerits, I would have felt everything so vividly, from how I acted to what I said to Evan, and died of embarrassment.

Isn't there a saying that it's better not to know?

Anyway, I'm going to kill her next time we meet.

I don't know if I can kill her, though.

As I chuckled inwardly and sharpened the blade of revenge, I was still worried about what to do if the Succubus Queen was alive.

Suddenly, Evan's appearance changed.

'Huh.'

There's only one factor that could change his appearance.

A Relic?

The only Relic that would be useful in this situation would be the Water Relic, which is in charge of the Holy Power of healing.

Evan, who approached me, raised his hand and placed it on my body.

Then,

'Oh, oh oh…'

The warm energy of Holy Power entered and began to drive out the Demonic energy.

No.

No way.

The pleasant feeling is disappearing…

Gyaaaah, don't do this…

'Ah, no, this is the obvious thing to do…!'

How complicated is the situation right now, and isn't this the obvious thing to do?

But why?

Why do I feel so bad?

Evan carefully picked up each of my severed body parts and put them back together.

The concentrated healing Holy Power contained in the Water Relic was already circulating throughout my body, driving out the Demonic energy and healing my body, so when the severed body parts were attached, they were restored in an instant.

As the Holy Power driving out the Demonic energy had nothing left to do, the range of vision naturally returned, and I was able to convey Thought-forms properly again.

"…"

Hmm…

This is right, but…

"Aria…!"

Evan, seeing that I had returned to normal, hugged me tightly.

Forgetting that I was naked, Evan kept muttering that he was relieved.

'Does he… not see me as a woman?'

Or maybe, because of the situation, he's more relieved that I'm back to normal than that I'm naked.

I remembered flirting with Evan while naked, showing him even my important parts, just a moment ago.

Anyway… I never intended to get married in the first place, and now I have a body that can't be married off at all.

Does it even matter?

'No… it does…'

If I didn't see Evan as a man.

If I didn't see him as someone I'm attracted to, I wouldn't be embarrassed to be seen like that.

I was so embarrassed at the time that I even declared surrender, which I had never done before.

Fortunately, I was being controlled by the Succubus at the time, so my true feelings weren't revealed.

Anyway, the fact that I was genuinely embarrassed and even cried about showing that side of myself to Evan, of all people…

'Maybe… I also…'

I might have feelings for Evan.

I like Evan…

I…

Hmm…

'Ugh…'

My head started to hurt.

I wanted to get up and deal with the Succubus Queen-related matters first.

But why?

If I showed that I was awake now, I wouldn't be able to bear the embarrassment and would really cry.

All sorts of emotions are bubbling up right now, and in this state, being hugged by Evan, who saw everything about me just a moment ago… clinging to the person who likes me?

Don't be ridiculous.

I'm too embarrassed to do it.

No, I can't!

'I should pretend to be asleep…'

So I decided to pretend to be unconscious.

Anyway, unless I get up and move on my own, Evan has no way of knowing whether I'm awake or unconscious.

So…

- Evan. You should at least put some clothes on her.

"Oh, uh…"

Is that Estel?

- Poor child… I'm sorry I couldn't protect you this time either…

"…"

Evan reluctantly followed Estel's words and took off his coat to put it on me.

Is that really Estel?

It was refreshing to see the Holy Sword speak like that for the first time.

I heard that when she accepted Solanis's Relic, she became very aggressive and proactive…

Given the nature of the Water Relic, which handles the Holy Power of healing, it's only natural that she would have such a benevolent and motherly personality.

"…"

- Evan?

"U, uh… I'll put it on her…"

Evan put clothes on me with a somewhat regretful look.

"…"

Knowing why he was regretful, I couldn't just let it go… I somehow hid my embarrassed feelings and continued to pretend to be unconscious.

That was dangerous.

I almost got angry about where he was looking.

Yes, getting angry about that isn't like Aria, the Saintess, right…

That's how it is…

'I really can't stand it…'

I can feel that Evan really likes me…

Something… felt strange.

Really…

5 - Succubus Queen

I couldn't maintain the Barrier like that, so as soon as the situation was resolved, I immediately released it.

Even so, I didn't let my guard down.

Although there wasn't really anything to be wary of.

'No matter how I think about it, it's strange...'

The Succubus Queen was definitely not someone who would die this easily.

She was the one who tormented me so much in the game.

One of the places I died the most was against the Succubus Queen, so there's no way I would be careless.

How much did I suffer at her hands in the first place? There's no way I'd be so foolish as to let my guard down.

"[... Prepare yourself, Evan.]"

Because it was such a large Barrier, it took some time to dispel it.

While the Barrier was being dispelled, I told Evan that it would be best to be on guard and swallowed hard.

It wouldn't be an easy fight.

I knew that better than anyone.

Moreover, if it went according to the story in the game, I would know how the future would unfold, making it easier to deal with the Succubus Queen, but now it was a completely new future.

Until now, it had flowed somewhat similarly, so I could use it as a reference, but now it was flowing into an entirely unknown world line, so if things went wrong, it would be the end.

I swallowed hard.

Thankfully, I hadn't used any of the Holy Power in the Relic.

With this much Holy Power, there wouldn't be any major problems in dealing with the Succubus Queen.

I had already figured out her principles of action through the time I had sunk into this game.

I inwardly resolved to win this fight no matter what and dispelled the Barrier completely without hesitation.

And then,

"... Did we return...?"

We were out of the Barrier and lying on the bed in the original inn room.

That's right, back to the moment when Evan was about to pounce on me.

"Aria...! This is!"

I was almost naked, and his posture was reminiscent of such a situation, so Evan, flustered, quickly backed away and apologized.

But that wasn't important right now.

"[There's no time to hesitate! We have to move quickly!]"

Time was of the essence.

We had to stop the Succubus Queen from escaping as quickly as possible.

I didn't care about my attire right now.

Honestly, I was hoping that this assumption was wrong, that she had just been defeated as is...!

'Right... There's no way she would have come in her true form in the first place...!!'

Succubus Queen.

That woman was extremely cautious.

Just looking at how she had been subtly plotting behind the scenes without revealing herself until now, she was someone who didn't allow for direct confrontation.

She was so overly cautious that she would knock on even a well-built stone bridge at least three times before crossing it, to the point where I suspected she might have paranoia.

Her outwardly revealed personality was a kind of act.

No, it could be seen as the nature of the Succubus species.

But that's why she was such an oddball, reigning as the Succubus Queen.

Anyway, for such a person to openly enter a place that was obviously full of traps, no matter how you looked at it, was absurd.

'But seeing the amount of power she showed, she must have exhausted a lot of power to summon that clone...'

Moreover, Evan had even hit her in his transformed state as the Relic of Purification.

She would definitely be continuously leaking traces of Demonic energy in the flames of the sun that kept burning away all evil.

As expected, the moment I followed the traces of Demonic energy and went outside, I realized that something was starting to go wrong.

"Woman... Womaaaan..."

"Krrr, I can't take it anymore..."

The condition of the men walking around the streets didn't look very good.

The humans who hadn't been coming out of their homes due to the discord with the Matimos Tribe were now out and about in the village.

Even...

'Crap, crazy...'

Mental Confusion.

It seemed that the Succubus Queen had manipulated the minds of all the villagers with her ability.

And that was...

"It's a woman...!"

Targeting humans who weren't under a spell... Or maybe not, but anyway.

The moment I saw something bulging between their legs, I immediately averted my gaze.

I could even see something wet seeping out through the thick cloth, they were so excited.

'That crazy, vicious woman...!!'

I couldn't bear to look at it, so I tried to get away immediately, but...

"Woman...?!"

'Oh no...!!'

Everyone's eyes turned to me.

Although I may not have much appeal as a woman, I am still a biological female, and a very beautiful one at that, and right now I was only wearing a coat, so I was in a precarious state where things were barely covered.

It was enough to attract attention.

"[Ugh...!!]"

They seemed to be ordinary citizens...

It was hard to believe that she would have used such a high-level Mental Confusion on such citizens, so if I used Purification magic here, I could definitely return them to their original state.

But...

'I have to conserve my Holy Power right now...!'

If I used Holy Power here, my already insufficient Holy Power could be completely depleted.

If that happened, I wouldn't even be able to move, let alone face the Succubus Queen, so for now, I had no choice but to turn my back on them with tears in my eyes.

More than anything...

'I've been exposed to the Succubus Queen's Yin energy...'

The Demonic energy of an Incubus causes sexual arousal.

The moment I used Holy Power to purify them, I would experience a rebound, and I might end up getting aroused instead of them.

I didn't want that to happen.

"Aria!"

Ah, Evan.

Even if I came out first, Evan should have been much faster than me, so I wondered why he was so late. The moment I focused my Holy Power,

I ended up seeing something I shouldn't have seen.

"Men~!!!"

"Kyaaaak!!"

All the women in the village were chasing after Evan in a semi-nude state.

'Oh... Sheet...'

It was less for me because I saw everyone as 3D models, but there were even middle-aged women and grandmothers among them.

I'm really sorry to the villagers, but at this point, it was safe to say that the Succubus Queen had consumed quite a bit of power.

'It will take time for her to escape...'

Just because it was a clone didn't mean it was completely unaffected.

That's why we were chasing after her thanks to the traces of Demonic energy.

'Not much left...!'

I quickly followed the traces.

The traces led to the highest building and went up to the rooftop.

It seemed that she couldn't immediately return to the Demon realm with her current power, so she was trying to return while consuming as little Demonic energy as possible, but no way.

As expected, that clone wasn't a weak one.

'She was wary of me...!'

It was a clone with almost 70 percent of her power.

If we could find the real one, killing her would be a piece of cake.

Finding her was also a piece of cake.

The only problem was that we really didn't have much time left.

'Then all that's left is to deal with these people...!'

If she had just set it up so that they would attack based on the difference between men and women, those under Mental Confusion would be biting and sucking each other, so she most likely used Mental Confusion to target only those with a sound mind.

In that case, even if I made them clash with the male forces that were currently targeting me, it wouldn't release the aggro.

Is there only one thing left?

"[Evan!!]"

I reached out to Evan.

Evan reflexively grabbed my hand, and I gathered the Holy Power contained in the Relic and applied the maximum level of physical ability enhancement buffs.

And...

"[Please hug me...!]"

I hugged Evan as he was.

"...?!"

Evan was flustered by my sudden embrace, but there was no time.

I immediately shot Holy Power at the building with my finger and hit it.

"[Jump over there!]"

I'll control it.

You just jump!

"O-okay...!"

Evan was flustered by my words, but he nodded and jumped.

"Waaaaah...!"

Whether the physical enhancements I had given him were worth it or not, his leg strength was incredible.

The wind was so strong that I couldn't help but scream.

But...

'I can see the view well...!'

I don't look around with my eyes.

I laid down a Barrier on the ground at the exact angle and timing.

At that moment,

"[Evan!!]"

Evan, having confirmed that I had deployed the Barrier, stepped on it and jumped into the air once more.

This was none other than aerial stepping.

Evan had finally come to dominate even the sky...

"Ugh..."

When I secured the view below with Holy Power, I could see the Succubus Queen, who had already opened the gate to the Demon realm, trying to enter.

Where do you think you're going, you bitch.

"[Evan.]"

There was no need for a long explanation.

I handed him the Relic of Purification and said it, and Evan smiled.

"『Divine Punishment』."

At that moment,

Kwaaaaaang!

A huge pillar of light encompassing the entire rooftop struck the building directly.

Burning all the evil things inside.

6 - Succubus Queen

‘How in the world…!’

On the rooftop of the building,

Opening a dimensional gate back to the Demon realm, the Succubus Queen gritted her teeth.

At first, when she discovered a gap in the Hero's heart that she could penetrate, she thought this would be an easy task.

When her Demonic energy successfully infiltrated and the half-corrupted Hero tried to assault the Saintess, she was even excited at the thought of enjoying their demise as a delightful snack.

The Hero and Saintess, both with beautiful appearances that satisfied her aesthetic sense, and the Hero, who genuinely cherished and loved the Saintess, being forced to rape her due to her Demonic energy and then slay her with the Holy Sword.

The despair of betrayal and the fear that the Hero she trusted was trying to kill her… The Succubus Queen smiled sinisterly, imagining the Saintess's face as her tastes would be satisfied.

Then, she clutched her pounding heart and watched the situation unfold.

Of course, she knew the Saintess wouldn't die, but she thought that alone would inflict a mental death upon the Saintess.

For religious fanatics who were half-crazed, the shock and betrayal towards someone they trusted would be a sharper thorn than constant pain.

However,

‘How is that even possible…?!’

Her Demonic energy, which had properly slipped into the gap, wasn't purified.

If it had been purified, they would have recognized it as a trap or, at the very least, deemed it dangerous and retreated from the spot.

But they didn't.

Only… with their feelings for each other.

Especially the Hero, with only the desire to protect the woman he loved, not only filled the gap but even drove out her power.

If it had ended there, she would have been disappointed and returned.

She certainly would have…!

Why…!!

‘Was that a trap?!’

As if it were a prepared trap, a Holy magic circle activated and trapped her in a Barrier.

Moreover, it was a powerful Holy Power Barrier that even she couldn't escape, as if they already knew she was the opponent.

Exceeding the limits of the Barrier the Saintess could deploy, they had even prepared in advance by drawing the Holy magic circle!

If she had sent her main body instead of a clone, thinking it might be a good idea, she probably would have died on the spot.

Her excessive caution, which had always saved her life, had saved her this time as well.

"Ugh…"

However, she had consumed a lot of Demonic energy to create the clone, and since it was a clone created by taking more than half of her power, the feedback when it was destroyed was beyond imagination.

If she had given it a little more power, she would have fainted on the spot from the pain of the Holy Power.

"I have to… escape…!"

Already caught in a trap,

If she didn't return to the Demon realm immediately, she might die here in vain.

Judging so, the Succubus Queen hurried to open the dimensional gate.

It was that moment.

"Ah…"

The sun burned red.

Soon, a chilling sensation ran through the Succubus Queen's entire body.

An intuition that if she stayed here, she might literally be annihilated.

Trusting the intuition that had always saved her life, the Succubus Queen hurriedly got up and tried to escape.

However,

Kwaaaaaa!

"Kyaaaaak!"

The speed of the pillar of light was beyond imagination.

No matter how skilled the executives of the Demon King Army were, it was impossible to move faster than light.

The Succubus Queen momentarily lost consciousness from the sensation of her entire body being scorched.

And when she regained consciousness,

Thud!

"Hoo…"

A man with red light burning all over his body, and a blonde-haired girl held in his arms.

The Hero and the Saintess had reached her.

"Is that a Demon King Army executive?"

To the Hero, Evan's question, Aria replied.

"[Succubi are inherently weak in combat. Their most terrifying aspect is that they can infiltrate the minds of any being, unless there is a significant difference in power or they possess Holy Power like us.]"

That was right.

The combat power of Succubi was among the lowest of demons.

What made them terrifying was their unique mental magic, unmatched by anyone else.

Among them, the Succubus Queen had an extremely high level of skill, and although her combat power was far below other executives, she was at the level of an executive and could cast mental magic on anyone.

In other words, the world was practically hers.

"[We have to deal with her quickly… If she crosses over to the dimensional gate, there's no turning back!]"

At Aria's cry, Evan nodded and raised the Holy Sword.

He intended to finish her off immediately.

But…

"Heh, heh heh…"

The Succubus Queen chuckled.

She didn't want to take this out, the Succubus Queen muttered, then glared at the Saintess with wide eyes.

She had no eyes.

But… Aria had Thought-form spreading around her.

Moreover, Aria had almost exhausted her Holy Power, so this was her only chance.

Following the Thought-form,

The Succubus Queen's body gradually began to fade.

“…!”

Thinking she was escaping, Evan hurriedly swung the Holy Sword, but the Succubus Queen disappeared even faster.

The moment the Holy Sword was about to touch her, the Succubus Queen's figure vanished.

"What…!"

Evan looked around in confusion, but

"Heh, heh heh…"

A strange laughter was heard from an odd place.

It was clearly Aria's voice, but… Evan sensed something was wrong.

Aria would never laugh like that.

“… Aria?”

Evan looked down at Aria and asked.

And,

“…!”

Aria opened her eyes, which were dyed red, and looked up at Evan.

"You let your guard down, Hero."

Thwack!

"Kuhak…!"

A blade of Demonic energy that suddenly appeared pierced the upper right side of Evan's chest.

"Tch…!"

She aimed for the head…!

Muttering so, Aria stepped away from Evan and created some distance.

"Kugh… Haa… Ugh…"

Evan groaned and touched the stabbed area.

Weak Demonic energy continuously tormented him.

"Damn it… Demonic energy isn't coming out properly…!"

Because it was the Saintess's body, Demonic energy wouldn't come out.

The Succubus Queen wore a frustrated expression.

"Well, whatever, the Saintess is taking all the pain from being polar opposites, so there's no problem, right?"

After being annoyed for a moment, the Succubus Queen chuckled and said.

Evan suppressed a groan from the pain of the invading Demonic energy and looked at Aria.

The faint golden eyes he had occasionally seen were now dyed red and clearly looking at Evan.

And in her hand was a pale pink blade.

"You bastard…!!"

Evan glared, realizing the situation.

But the Succubus Queen was confident.

"What, is there a problem?"

"I will definitely kill you…!!"

As Evan raised the Holy Sword and spoke, the Succubus Queen, who had taken over Aria's body, scoffed.

"Ha, can you even do it? Heh heh…"

The Succubus Queen said so and approached Evan with a giggle.

Then, she showed Evan her fair neck.

"Come on, try to cut me?"

As if daring him to cut her, she showed her neck to Evan and shook it back and forth.

He couldn't cut her.

Evan gripped the hilt tightly.

"Puhahaha! You're so stupid. Really stupid!"

The Succubus Queen burst into laughter, realizing that he couldn't cut her.

It was practically like gaining an invincible shield!

"Right~ Cutting me is the same as cutting the woman you love so much! And she'll feel all the pain, right? Huh? Cut me~ Huh?"

There was nowhere to escape anyway.

It would still take time for the Demonic energy she had stored to create a dimensional gate.

The Succubus Queen decided that she needed to buy time for now.

If her Holy Power recovered, she would abandon this body and escape before then, but by then, she would have already dragged the Saintess to the Demon realm and neutralized her, so there was no problem.

It was a perfect plan.

He probably didn't know this.

Thinking so, the Succubus Queen decided to act boldly to buy more time.

"Should I show you the precious parts of the woman you love so much? Wouldn't that give you the courage to cut me, thinking, 'The Saintess I knew wouldn't act like this'?"

Evan bit his lip at her words, fluttering her coat that barely covered her body while giggling.

"Well… if you can't cut me…"

She would have to die.

The Succubus Queen sneered and swung her sword.

It was then.

Swish.

"Huh?"

The arm holding the sword disappeared.

A clean cut.

Evan's eyes widened.

It wasn't him who did it.

Evan turned his head with trembling eyes.

“… Step aside, Hero. I'll do it.”

There stood Duke Valencia, wearing a pained expression.

Holding his beloved sword in one hand.

Succubus Queen (Interlude)

“D, Duke Valencia…!”

Evan’s eyes widened as he called out his name.

Clatter!

“Haa… haa…”

“W, we almost didn’t make it…”

Stella and Uriel, who had arrived late, were gasping for breath.

Stella, in particular, looked pale, as if she had used a great deal of Demonic energy.

“A, are you okay, Stella?”

“I, I’m fine… It’s just that trying to move so many people so far away was a bit much… Haa…”

Wasn’t that the opposite of fine?

Uriel briefly thought so, but since Stella said she was okay, there was nothing he could do.

“S, Stella… Uriel…?”

“Evan? You’re alive, that’s a relief…”

“Evan! Listen! The villagers suddenly became strange…! Huh? Why is Aria over there…?!”

Uriel’s eyes widened.

Drip, drip.

Aria, her arm severed, staggered backward, staring blankly at her severed arm.

“…Uriel. That’s not Aria.”

“Huh? What do you mean it’s not Aria…”

“Succubus Queen… A Demon King Army executive has hijacked Aria’s body.”

“…!”

At that, Uriel looked at Aria with a shocked expression.

“Ah… hmm…”

Aria, or rather, the Succubus Queen, whose arm holding the sword had been severed, looked down at her severed arm with an indifferent expression before turning her head to find the arm that had flown away.

The cleanly severed arm, not crushed, lay carelessly on the ground, scattering blood.

Soon, looking at the arm with blood pooling around it, the Succubus Queen lamented.

It was because they had already become particles and disappeared.

The Succubus Queen then smirked and turned her head towards the Duke who had cut off her arm.

“You, you’re a Sword Saint, aren’t you? Didn’t you hear what I said earlier? I don’t feel pain…”

Swish.

“Eh…?”

What.

The Succubus Queen's words were cut short.

"…Saintess, please forgive me."

Valencia muttered with a face full of guilt.

Before him, bright red blood spurted out, soaking the floor.

Aria's body lay scattered on the floor, her arms and legs all severed.

"Ugh…!"

The Succubus Queen, who had fallen to the floor, suddenly groaned.

Even if she didn't feel pain, the shock didn't disappear, so after recovering from the impact of falling to the floor, the Succubus Queen asked them with an absurd expression.

"You, you guys… are you crazy…?"

Valencia didn't answer her question.

Even if he cut her, all the pain would be borne by Aria, and she wouldn't feel much pain herself.

That was definitely what she was thinking.

She thought there was no way he could cut her.

That was only natural.

The body she occupied now was the Saintess's body.

The body of the Saintess whom they so revered, idolized, and respected.

And yet…

'They cut me… without a second thought…!'

Moreover, she wasn't the one feeling the pain.

Aria was feeling it all.

"You… wouldn't know. How much hardship the Saintess has endured in this Demon Realm."

Valencia muttered, looking down at the Succubus Queen, whose limbs were all severed, with cold eyes.

He knew very well.

Valencia knew all too well.

The painful decision of the Empire to send each person, each with their own family and loved ones, to their deaths.

But if they didn't send them, it would be impossible to stop the countless Magical Creatures constantly pouring in from the north, so they had sacrificed the lives of the Empire's citizens to protect the northern front.

The resentment of the Empire's citizens echoed in the Demon Realm.

"The Saintess stepped forward to save the Empire's citizens."

To save someone, one must inevitably sacrifice oneself.

That was the Saintess.

The moment he learned the truth about being the Saintess, Valencia petitioned for her to return.

The pain was too great for her to bear.

The pain of the Empire's citizens in the Demon Realm… those who had been dragged there simply to protect their families and loved ones… that resentment… was too much for just one girl to handle.

And it wasn't something that one girl could handle alone.

And yet.

“The Saintess… never backed down from any hardship or adversity.”

Aria continued to heal.

Even on the front lines, in situations where Magical Creatures could attack at any moment and threaten her life, Aria constantly worked to save people.

Even though she was a Saintess with a kind of authority, almost like an incarnation of the Rumania Goddess, her limits were clear.

It was impossible to save all the Empire’s citizens who had died.

But even so, none of the Empire’s citizens disparaged her.

No one insulted her.

Because she had endured a great pain that even the Empire’s citizens who went to the front lines to protect their families, and further, to protect the Empire… and even further, to protect the world, could not fathom.

“The Saintess… is the kind of person who would ask us to cut her down rather than hesitate in this situation.”

“No way… there’s no way such a… such a human being could exist in this world…!”

Even wasting time was impossible.

They were serious.

“S, stop! If you try to touch me any more, I’ll destroy the Saintess’s mind…!”

“…!”

The Succubus Queen, who had nothing left to lose, shouted.

At that, Evan's eyes widened.

"Mind… you said…?"

"Hero…!"

"…Duke Valencia."

Evan called out to Valencia.

The moment Valencia saw the determination in Evan's eyes, he closed his mouth.

Then he stepped back.

"…Do it."

"Yes."

Answering that, Evan gritted his teeth.

Then he raised the Holy Sword and began to approach the Succubus Queen.

"H, Hero… you… what did you hear me say! If you come any closer, I'll destroy her mind…!"

Even though she was speaking as if threatening him, why was it?

The Succubus Queen felt that she wasn't in control.

It wasn't that she didn't have the power to destroy it.

Now that she had completely taken over the body, breaking into her mind and destroying it was a piece of cake.

Most humans would have their minds destroyed on their own if she just inflicted pain that they couldn't handle.

Whether it was physical or mental pain… there had never been anyone who was unharmed after being hit by the Succubus Queen's mental attack.

"Try it."

"Wh, what?"

"I said try it."

Evan raised the Holy Sword.

The Holy Sword, burning red with Solanis's Holy Power, and the boy with red hair hidden by the sun, was looking down at her with a ferocious expression.

'A, are these guys really crazy…?!'

Was this even possible?

She had said she would destroy her mind, but instead of having any effect, it had only provoked them even more.

'In that case…!'

She would just destroy her mind.

At least if the Saintess couldn't do her job, it would be helpful to the Demon King.

Judging that, the Succubus Queen gathered Demonic energy to destroy her mind.

It was at that moment.

Thwack!

"Keuh, cough…"

The Holy Sword had pierced Aria's heart, precisely.

Black blood, tainted with Demonic energy, flowed out, soaking the coat that Evan had given her.

Aria, no… the Succubus Queen, looked up at Evan with a look of near death.

“Wh… why… Sai…nte cough…”

Thud.

The Holy Sword was pushed in even deeper, and she slowly opened her mouth as if in pain.

“Ah… ahh…”

Tears flowed from Evan’s eyes.

Between the red hair that burned brightly, the golden eyes that were revealed… the feeling of despair emanating from the Hero was deeply felt.

“Why… why do I… have to do this…”

“Kuh, ah… wai…t…”

The massive amount of God of Purification’s Holy Power flowing in from the Holy Sword was driving the Succubus Queen crazy.

The pain of purifying a body full of Demonic energy.

Unlike the pain that is generally connected to the nerves, the pain of Holy Power and Demonic energy was a force directly applied to the soul, so no matter how much of a shield Aria was, it was impossible for the Succubus Queen to escape the clutches of pain.

“Die… die…! Dieeee!!”

Evan shouted in a voice full of despair and exploded Holy Power towards the Holy Sword he was holding.

Holy Power poured out from the heart pierced by the Holy Sword and spread throughout her body.

‘Crazy… bastards…’

It was a mistake.

Taking over the Saintess’s body was a complete mistake.

‘I don’t want to… I don’t wanna dieee…’

She didn’t want to die.

She didn’t want to die.

But more than dying, she hated the fact that they were living so nonchalantly.

‘I’ll… I’ll break their relationship…!!’

The moment she took over the body, the Succubus Queen knew.

Aria was clearly a virgin.

It didn’t make sense that they were virgins while thinking of each other so much.

But the fact that it was true…

‘Hehehe…’

The Succubus Queen smiled.

She had thought of a way to break their relationship.

If she turned the Saintess into a perverted woman, it would surely crack their deeply held beliefs.

Thinking that, the Succubus Queen pulled up Demonic energy as a last resort, just before dying.

In order to cast a curse that the current Saintess could never undo.

“Keu… aheueu… keureuk… hic…”

She couldn’t speak, but the Succubus Queen sneered at Evan.

As if telling him to do his best.

“……”

With that, the Succubus Queen completely disappeared.

Leaving behind Aria, who had closed her eyes while pierced by the Holy Sword.

1 - Curse...?

‘Ooh…’

Watching everything from the inside, I was once again impressed by the Succubus Queen.

And… I realized I had done something stupid because I was too overwhelmed.

‘It’s pointless for her to enter me.’

Of course, the Succubus Queen's mental magic, especially her spiritual possession, which involves her directly possessing someone, is a terrifying magic that instantly kills opponents of lower status.

It's called spiritual possession, but it's actually about pushing out the original soul and taking its place.

Normally, I would be pushed out and effectively dead, but…

Unfortunately, I am the Saintess.

A soul chosen by the Goddess, whose status has risen to demigod.

Even if my power itself is weaker than the Succubus Queen's, I can never be pushed back.

But that's why the Succubus Queen could dump everything on me and do whatever she wanted…

‘Haa… that felt good…’

Fortunately, I enjoyed the soul's pain caused by the clash of Holy Power and Demonic energy.

Not only that, but I was leisurely enjoying the appetizer that came from the body being attacked.

When the Holy Sword pierced my heart at the end, and the overwhelming Holy Power burned away all the Demonic energy, I felt like I was ascending to heaven.

But…

‘Wow…’

What am I looking at right now?

Evan, with an expression full of anger and despair, was crying while stabbing my heart with the Holy Sword, and the others couldn't bear to look at me and turned their heads away.

My limbs were cut off… and my clothes too…

‘No, at least the clothes…’

To be seen in this state even in front of Valencia… but then again, he's seen me in all sorts of states, so maybe it doesn't matter.

Anyway, the problem now is that the situation is a complete mess.

No matter how much I think about how to fix this, I can't find an answer…

Anyway… I've been deprived of my body by the Succubus Queen for too long, and I've been quite corrupted by the Succubus Queen's powerful Demonic energy, so I'll probably just sleep when I get back.

Originally, I should pray to recover Holy Power the fastest, but…

‘I don’t want to pray.’

That's for devout nuns, not me.

Anyway, even if I don't, my faith can't be low since I became the Saintess, and I know that the Goddess exists and what kind of being she is.

I believe the Goddess will take care of it.

More importantly, there's a more important problem than that right now.

‘C, could someone please put some clothes on me…’

I'm so embarrassed.

.

.

.

“…”

Inside a room filled with antique decorations.

Evan looked down at Aria, who was lying on the bed, with a pitiful expression.

- Evan…

Next to her was her Relic.

Hoping that the Holy Power residing in the Relic would help Aria, Evan sat in a chair, rubbed his face as if washing it, and sighed.

Click, creak

“… Didn’t sleep again today.”

The owner of the voice heard as the door suddenly opened was Valencia.

He looked at Evan with a worried expression and said.

“If you keep staying up all night like that, the Saintess will not like it.”

“More than that… have you found out what condition Aria is in?”

Valencia's mouth closed at that.

It meant that he hadn't found out yet.

“Damn it…”

Evan cursed in a gloomy voice.

Aria was cursed.

A curse whose identity could not be determined.

“But it's not like there was no gain at all. It might be hard for you to hear, but… the curse on the Saintess right now is a type of curse that the Saintess cannot undo.”

Valencia said that and approached Aria.

“Saintess… I’m sorry.”

Valencia said that and slightly lifted Aria's pajamas.

What was revealed was,

“I’ve learned something about this.”

Valencia said, pointing to a symbol.

“What is it?”

Evan turned his head to look at Valencia and asked.

An unidentified symbol drawn on her lower abdomen.

It looked ominous at first glance, so Evan couldn't help but feel uncomfortable.

“This is… said to be a symbol of the Succubus. It seems to be called the Yin Gate…”

“Yin Gate…?”

The Succubus Queen's symbol was drawn on the Saintess's lower abdomen?

“And it seems to affect the lower abdomen… or more precisely, the place where the uterus exists.”

“…”

Evan didn't have much knowledge about sex, but he wasn't ignorant of what the uterus was.

It was an organ that only existed in women and symbolized women.

So that's why.

“How could the Succubus's symbol be on the Saintess…”

“According to the speculation of the mages… the magic that a mage uses by burning their own life force is said to have tremendous power. It is highly likely that she cast a powerful curse, betting her life on it just before she died. They said that it would be impossible to undo at the Saintess's current level.”

“That can’t be…”

A curse magic used by betting one's life on the line just before death.

So, of course, its power would be at a level that would make one speechless.

Even if Aria, whose level was lower than the Succubus Queen's, was extremely compatible, the probability of undoing it was close to 0.

“And… since she’s a Succubus, they said it’s probably a curse related to sex.”

“… What kind of curse is it?”

“I don’t know that far…”

Evan lowered his head at Valencia's words.

Anyway, it was fortunate that it wasn't a painful curse, but it was a curse that felt more unpleasant than that.

‘A sexual… curse…’

What curse could be more unpleasant and despairing for a woman than that?

He only felt more and more sorry that he couldn't protect her properly.

“Umm…”

“Are you waking up? I’ll be going now. If I’m the first thing you see when you wake up… I don’t think you’d like it very much.”

Valencia said that as he saw Aria trying to get up.

There's no way, Evan wanted to say, but for some reason, the words didn't come out.

Was it because he wanted to be alone with Aria?

He didn't know.

“[Evan…?]”

Aria called Evan carefully, as if she had woken up.

He slightly relieved his worried expression and greeted Aria, who had woken up.

“Are you okay, Aria?”

Evan reached out and carefully took Aria's hand as he asked.

It was then.

“Hic…… hic…!”

Aria made a strange noise as soon as her hand was held, and then suddenly started hiccuping.

“Are you okay? Why are you suddenly hiccuping…”

“[No…] hic! [I’m surprised…]”

What could be so surprising?

Could it be that she was surprised that he held her hand?

Feeling sorry for no reason, Evan said he would let go, but,

“[N, no, wait…]”

Aria grabbed the hand he was trying to let go of.

“A, Aria?”

“[C, can we… stay like this a little longer?]”

“I’m okay with it…”

Was Aria really okay?

Evan fiddled with Aria's warm and pleasant hand, but on the other hand, he kept worrying about whether she was really okay.

Besides…

‘The hand that pierced her heart…’

Evan felt like he was going to cry.

Although it was to defeat the Succubus Queen, he pierced Aria's heart.

Even so…

‘Aria…’

Aria was not blaming him, but sharing her warmth with him.

He didn't feel any resentment at all.

‘Let’s apologize.’

Let's apologize for sure when this situation is over.

Evan vowed inwardly.

Meanwhile…

‘What, what is this…?’

Aria had a flustered expression.

She was fine until she woke up, but as soon as she touched Evan's hand, she felt a strange sensation in her lower abdomen.

Not only that.

Just touching her hand made her heart pound, and she kept feeling good sensations in the area she touched.

‘Should I stay like this a little longer…?’

Aria was originally weak to pleasure.

Considering that she was a crazy bitch who liked to feel pleasure through pain and jumped into pain, it was possible to endure pleasure even more

than that, so Aria enjoyed the pleasure of touching Evan without revealing it.

‘What is it…’

She didn't know what it was, but she could guess.

The Succubus Queen must have left something strange on me just before she died.

‘No… what are you…’

To make me feel such unfamiliar and pleasant sensations until just before you die.

There's no other angel like this.

‘You’re the best…’

There was no one as terrible as that bitch in the game, but now that it's reality, she only does good things for me, how can she be so kind?

Aria thought that she could be called a Succubus Queen who gives generously.

‘From now on, I will become one with the Succubus Queen… Any insults towards the Succubus Queen will be considered insults towards me…’

This is sex.

Really…

2 - Curse...?

‘A curse, perhaps…’

If the Succubus Queen cast something on me before dying, it could only be a succubus's curse.

Of course, considering it was the Succubus Queen herself, I couldn't simply assume it was a curse related to sexual matters.

I couldn't deny the possibility that she might have cast a curse to mentally break me.

But…

‘Even so, I can't explain this feeling I get when I hold Evan's hand, no matter how much I think about it…’

I've only held Evan's hand so far, but it's hard to believe she just amplified my senses as a curse.

Then I have to assume that she cast a curse that would be fatal to me, at least as the "Saintess"…

"Aria…?!"

Evan seemed quite flustered when I didn't let go of his hand.

Come to think of it, I've never shown this side of myself to Evan before.

Evan's reaction was subtly amusing, but I couldn't help but think he was amazing.

‘He's seen me fall apart so tragically in front of his eyes more than once, enough to cause PTSD in a normal person, but he still likes me…’

If I were Evan, I might not be able to like me anymore.

Every time he saw my face, he would be reminded of those moments, so how could he look at me with loving eyes?

No, maybe it's my fault that Evan became such a monster.

"Ugh…"

Just touching Evan's hand makes me feel strange sensations down below.

‘This is the first time I've felt like this since I became this body…’

A throbbing… how should I put it, a feeling of boiling lust.

Just holding Evan's hand, I felt a completely new sensation that I had never experienced before, which piqued my interest.

And that wasn't all.

‘Did… did he always smell this good…?’

The scent I get from Evan, or rather, it's right to call it a fragrance.

Fragrance…?

Did Evan have a scent like that?

I don't think he wears any perfume, but for some reason, the smell from Evan felt good to me.

No, this is…

‘I, I shouldn't smell it…’

I turned my head slightly away from Evan.

Then the smell lessened a little.

It felt like my head was going strange just from smelling it.

It's a little different from the dizziness caused by pleasure that feels like pain… how should I put it… primal pleasure…?

A kind of pleasure that I seem to know well, but is so unfamiliar that I've never felt it in my life.

This is…

‘Is this… a woman's pleasure…?’

For me, who has only enjoyed pleasure from pain, regardless of whether it was a man or a woman, this kind of pleasure was unfamiliar but also inevitably intriguing.

I was wondering what it would feel like… something like that.

But…

‘That doesn't mean I'm going to do that kind of thing with Evan…’

I imagined doing that kind of thing with Evan.

I've seen Evan's proper appearance, though not clearly, so it was easy to imagine based on those memories.

I've also seen my own appearance in the mirror.

Until recently, those memories felt like a dream and were hard to recall, but thanks to Stella and Argent's care, I was able to see them properly.

The moment I imagined based on that appearance,

"Ugh…"

An unknown electrifying sensation flowed from below to my whole body.

I couldn't help but groan at the feeling of my lower abdomen throbbing.

‘N, no…’

…

No way.

‘T, that bitch…?!’

What kind of curse did she cast on me?

At first, I thought it was just an amplification of pleasure, but this is all nonsense, isn't it?!

‘D, do I like Evan…?’

This is because of the curse.

It has to be.

"[P, please leave…!!]"

"H, huh?!"

"[I'm sorry, Evan… please leave…!]"

Please go.

I let go of Evan's hand and pushed him away.

Just a moment ago, I was saying that I wanted to hold his hand a little longer, but now I was suddenly telling him to go away, so he seemed dumbfounded.

But Evan wasn't one to ignore my words.

With a somewhat aggrieved expression, Evan said that I must tell him if I was in pain, and then left the room.

As soon as Evan left, I gasped for breath and repeatedly washed my face with my dry hands to cover my flushed face.

‘Ah… this isn't easy, really…’

I never thought that she would leave behind such a crazy curse.

It seems like it will be difficult to look Evan in the eye for a while.

"Are you okay, Aria… I think it happened because I arrived too late…"

"Really… I've said it many times, it's not Stella's fault."

"…"

Stella lowered her head with a pitiful expression.

Since that day, Stella had been blaming herself.

There was nothing she could do at the time.

When she opened her eyes to the enormous surge of Holy Power, the situation had already erupted.

When Aria's magic circle was deployed, she didn't know what was going on, but she knew that they were fighting.

However, for some reason, Valencia was not there, and as soon as they came outside in a situation where only the two of them were left, many villagers started chasing them.

They couldn't harm them, and they couldn't just stand there, so the two of them somehow kept running away and stalling for time.

She lamented that she wouldn't have come outside if she had known things would turn out like this.

Then they happened to meet Valencia, and after hearing Valencia's words that powerful but scattered Demonic energy was felt in a building, they sent Valencia there first.

Since designating coordinates was not an easy task, they sent Valencia first, who could arrive quickly even if she Teleported to the wrong place around there, and then Teleported again with stabilized coordinates.

And by that time, the situation was completely over.

"I… I still seem useless…"

Uriel, who still hadn't grown much, was dumbfounded by Stella's words, who was almost about to break through the wall of the Archmage, but

Uriel, who didn't really care about that kind of thing, just let it go.

Right now, more than that…

"Evan?"

She was more interested in Evan, who was standing in front of Aria's hospital room with a dazed expression.

"What's wrong?"

"Ah, well… Aria kicked me out…"

"Huh?!"

Uriel's eyes widened.

What on earth did he do inside that made the kind Aria kick Evan out?

Uriel couldn't understand, but…

"Is it because of that curse after all."

Stella, who knew about the situation, could only worry about whether Aria was okay.

"...If it's because of that curse, I think I was too hasty… I'll go outside for some fresh air for a while."

Hearing those words, Evan said that with a guilty expression and turned his head.

"Stella, please take care of Aria."

Leaving only those words behind, Evan moved his steps outside.

"Um… should we go in for now?"

"Y, yes…"

Stella and Uriel looked at each other, nodded, and opened the door and went inside.

As soon as they entered, Aria, who had raised her upper body and was spacing out in the same way, seemed startled and turned to look at the two of them.

"[Ah… is that Stella and Uriel…?]"

"Y, yeah. Are you okay…?"

"[…]"

Aria didn't answer for a while.

Is she not okay after all?

"[Um… Stella?]"

Just as Stella's expression was about to turn bad at that thought, Aria carefully called out to Stella.

"Why?"

"[Could you come here for a moment and hold out your hand to me?]"

"…?"

What kind of request is this all of a sudden?

Stella had such a question, but anyway, it was a request that Aria had made to her… and it wasn't that difficult, so she nodded and approached Aria and held out her hand.

As soon as she approached and held out her hand, Aria held her hand and remained still for a while.

"…Are you okay?"

Why is she suddenly asking me to hold out my hand?

She asked with such thoughts in her heart, but somehow Aria seemed troubled.

"[…I might not be okay… No, should I say this is okay…]"

Aria looked shocked.

Is she really okay…?

Or is she still struggling because of that curse?

They didn't know what kind of curse it was, so their heads were about to ache.

And…

‘I, I don't know if I should call this fortunate, really…’

Aria too…

She could only feel a deep sense of self-loathing at what had happened to her body.

3 - Curse...?

‘This… isn’t going to be easy…’

At first, I thought it would be a simple curse that only made me feel pleasure from trivial things related to the opposite sex.

But it seems what I gained from the curse wasn’t that simple.

‘I didn’t expect this…’

It wasn’t just Stella.

Just touching Uriel made me feel that unknown sensation.

It was definitely less than with Evan, but there was a huge difference between not feeling anything at all and feeling something, however slight.

The former would have allowed me to know exactly what kind of curse it was, but the latter made it difficult to accurately grasp the nature of the curse placed on me.

Besides…

“…Should I tell her about this…?”

“Still, it’s Aria’s body, wouldn’t hiding it be worse…?”

From the conversation between Stella and Uriel, it seems something strange is engraved on my body.

The Succubus Queen’s curse, and something strange engraved on my body.

The two seemed to be debating whether to tell me or not, but I couldn’t help but notice just by listening to their conversation.

If I were Aria as I've been portraying her, even if I knew more about demons than the other kids, I would still know less than the kids who directly sought advice and heard stories about them.

But as someone who knows the in-game settings and most of the knowledge, I couldn't possibly not know after hearing just that much.

'Damn it…'

Of all things, it seems the *yin* mark, practically a symbol of succubi, was engraved on my lower abdomen, specifically where the uterus is.

At that point, it's safe to say it's a curse related to sex.

The only problem is, as I said before, I don't know exactly what kind of curse it is.

If it were the kind of curse that only made me horny for Evan, I could just ask him to undo it.

'Ah, or is it not…?'

If it were that kind of curse, then I would essentially have to…

Ugh…

Um…

'Ugh, damn it…!!'

Thinking about it makes my head hurt.

I really don't know what to do.

'I am interested, but…'

Being interested is a little different from wanting to do it.

No, it's a lot different.

Just thinking about me fawning over Evan gives me goosebumps all over my body.

In the first place, doing such a thing is absolutely not in line with the concept of this Aria, it's like an NG in a movie.

I've been doing so well so far, do you think I'm going to undo it just because I got cursed?

No way.

'I'd rather suffer in silence.'

I thought so and shook my head wildly.

Stella and Uriel, who didn't know much about my inner thoughts, were looking at me strangely, as if I had suddenly gone crazy, shaking my head wildly after asking them to hold my hands.

'M-Maybe I should ask Stella and Uriel…?'

Just being with the two of them already makes me feel like my body is heating up again.

Maybe I should ask them because the curse is making my body…

'Ah, no, that's even worse!!'

I'd rather cling to Evan than cling to the two of them, who only think of me as a friend, saying my body is hot. Wouldn't that be even more wrong?

I have an image that I've built up so far, so it wouldn't be that big of a problem, but they would think I've changed because of the succubus's influence.

'Is solving it alone the answer?'

Thinking about it makes me feel lost.

Until now, my whole body was filled with Holy Power, so there was no room for such desires, and I never had the time to feel pleasure as a woman…

‘No, is that not true…?’

If the pleasure I gained from pain was sexual pleasure, then I should say no, but if it wasn’t…

Anyway, until now, defeating the Demon King and saving this world was a higher priority for me, so I wasn’t interested in it at all.

However, even if I wasn’t interested until now, if the curse makes me feel like I’ll go crazy if I don’t solve it, wouldn’t it be better to take the plunge, even if it’s a little scary?

“[C-Could… could you both leave for a moment…?]”

I need some time to think.

No, not just a moment, but a long time.

Unlike Evan, whom I had to push away myself, the two of them fortunately read my mood and left, saying they would call me later when I felt better, and opened the door and left.

I watched the two of them leave the room, sighed, and then used Holy Power to look at my body.

Holy Power was uniquely capable of this.

I could see my body in 3D.

In the first place, it’s not an ordinary ability to be able to see 360 degrees around me, but…

Since I’m using Holy Power to look around, I guess it can’t be helped, but…

If I do this, I can quickly catch any mistakes I make, but…

‘…I can’t do it…’

Not in Valencia’s guest room, of all places…

‘After all, pleasure is pain…’

Pleasure from pain is the best.

Not this embarrassing stuff…

Haa…

“Aria… is she going to be okay…”

Stella and Uriel, who had come outside, had worried expressions as they recalled Aria’s appearance just now.

The influence of the curse was definitely there.

They didn’t know what kind of curse it was, but the magicians speculated that Aria was now experiencing a completely different world than usual.

To that extent, the curse cast by the powerful Succubus Queen, even at the cost of her own life, would be an enormous curse.

Frankly speaking, they even said not to take it strangely no matter how Aria changed, and to accept that it was unavoidable because of the curse.

“How was it?”

As soon as Stella and Uriel came out, Evan approached and asked.

Of course, Stella and Uriel had only approached and held out their hands, and had to accept the eviction without saying anything else.

Aria wouldn't have done that to make them feel bad, so there must have been something so shocking.

"Why did she ask us to hold her hands…"

"Hands… is there something there? Maybe she can't use Holy Power anymore…"

"That's probably not it."

Evan said with certainty.

He couldn't help but be sure.

Holy Power was definitely flowing well inside Aria's body.

The Demonic energy that maintained the curse was pushing back Aria's Holy Power and settling in deeply, but apart from that, she was just a normal Aria.

"Rather than just thinking in that direction… we need to think about what is most fatal to Aria."

The most powerful and desperate curse that the Succubus Queen could cast on Aria.

A curse that would be desperately overwhelming for Aria to accept.

And that's something that can be found out by holding hands.

Holding hands…

"Hmm… I didn't feel anything when our bodies touched each other, so it's not like it causes a curse when bodies touch…"

"Me neither."

"Me too."

The three of them didn't feel anything special when they touched.

But if Aria's eyes widened as if she felt something as soon as she held their hands…

"What do you feel when you hold hands?"

"Um… the other person's warmth?"

"Isn't it just the sensation of hands touching each other?"

"The sensation of touching, sensation? Wait, sensation?"

Sensation.

Stella's eyes widened at those words.

Aria's appearance when she let out a soft groan when she held hands with them.

And if they were to pick the most desperate thing for Aria…

'N-No way…'

Stella's face turned pale as she thought of the possibility.

They didn't know what kind of personality the Succubus Queen had since she had already disappeared, but if they knew the principle of using the Saintess's power, there was the most powerful curse she could cast.

The moment she thought about that curse, Stella's face turned pale.

"Sensation… amplification…"

It's not limited to other things.

From simple touch… to the pain Aria would feel.

What if all of those were amplified to an enormous level?

If Aria’s expression hardened because she thought that the pain she had to endure had risen to a level she could no longer handle.

Then they could fully explain Aria’s reactions to them.

“Sensation amplification… you say…?”

Evan’s expression also gradually hardened as he heard those words.

Sensation amplification is one of the most common techniques used by succubi when they steal essence, but,

It was the worst curse for Aria, who always suffered pain during treatment.

4 - Curse...?

“… It’s not impossible.”

Valencia, after hearing Stella's conjecture about the curse, said with a cold sweat, agreeing that it might be true.

As he said, it wasn't an impossible guess, so Stella, Uriel… and Evan nodded as if they expected it.

"No way… then…"

"In effect, you'll have to stop using the Saintess's power to heal someone. You're already enduring a level of pain that's hard to bear, but if you feel pain that could be several times worse… it won't stay at the physical level anymore."

At that point, Aria's soul might even be damaged.

A terrible curse that could leave her unable to recover, mentally dead.

That amplified sensation, which would be quite frightening even to an ordinary person, was no different from sealing the Saintess's power, which involved pain.

Just healing a cut would feel like stabbing and gouging that part with a knife, so how much worse would it be to heal severed limbs or burns?

Perhaps the dizzying pain felt just by starting treatment would make her faint on the spot.

It would be a relief if she just fainted.

Even now, the pain is too great for a girl named Aria to bear… I couldn't believe that I had committed an act that would multiply that pain.

"That's an absurd curse…"

Of course, it wasn't certain, but the content was so credible that they had no choice but to believe Stella's guess right away.

Otherwise, there was no way Aria would show such unfamiliar behavior, like flinching or groaning when holding hands.

“… I’m sorry. If I had finished it off for sure there…”

Evan said, bowing his head as if blaming himself.

Stabbing the heart and spreading Holy Power throughout the body was certainly a good method, but Evan had a better method.

Using 『Heaven's Wrath』 like when he burned the Succubus Queen's body would have been one of those methods.

It wasn't impossible to kill the Succubus Queen in one blow so that she couldn't do anything else.

After all, if he had just unleashed a powerful technique with the momentum to blow Aria's body away, without thinking about Aria, she would have been annihilated without even having time to cast a curse.

But Evan couldn't do that.

He had honed his sword this far only to protect Aria, and now it was impossible for him not to think about Aria.

At least for Evan.

Knowing that, and being able to understand Evan well enough, they just didn't say anything.

Aria was that important to them.

"Then what should we do? We have to undo Aria's curse quickly…"

“… I hesitate to say this, but I wonder if it might be better to retire the Saintess as is.”

Valencia said, bowing his head slightly with a pitiful expression.

Valencia, who had witnessed with his own eyes on the front lines how much Aria had suffered, couldn't let her subjugate the Demon King even if it meant undoing the curse again.

Everyone in this world should be grateful to her.

For Aria, who alone endures and perseveres, taking the place of the suffering of all those who suffer from the Demon King…

It might seem like too much, but at least Valencia thought it was natural.

But…

"Lord Argent…"

“… I know the situation is not easy.”

Valencia wasn't a fool who didn't know reality.

Sometimes you have to abandon ideals and act realistically.

No matter how pitiful Aria is, in this situation where all of humanity, all living things in this world, are in danger beyond Aria, it was inappropriate to say that Aria had worked hard so far, so let's let her rest now.

If Aria doesn't participate in the Demon King subjugation here and rests, all of humanity will be destroyed.

In the end, Aria would be in endless pain as well.

"Really… it's the worst."

Valencia sighed.

It was true that he always respected and appreciated Aria, but that made it even more painful that it was impossible to say that he wanted her to rest in the current situation.

We had to subjugate the Demon King as soon as possible and bring peace to the world.

Definitely.

“… By the way, what happened to the village?”

Uriel asked Valencia, as if suddenly remembering.

Valencia replied in a tone that told her not to worry.

"It's okay. I told the people of the territory with evidence that it was caused by a Demon King Army executive. Although that happened, we will be able to maintain the relationship for the time being, even if it's just as a temporary measure."

But that relationship won't last long either.

No matter how much a Demon King Army executive was behind it, it was still true that someone from the Matimos Tribe had committed the crime.

Unfortunately, no one remembers that the Succubus Queen caused the chaos by casting mental confusion throughout the territory in order to escape this time, so there were many who couldn't believe that the Demon King Army executive caused this incident.

It wasn't like the situation would change if they didn't believe it, so it was closer to just letting it go.

It was obvious that this would eventually cause trouble.

"Anyway… then all that's left is the Trial of Courage that the Saintess mentioned."

“… To be honest, I thought we would face a Demon King Army executive after completing the Trial of Courage…”

“Fortunately, it wasn’t that difficult of a fight this time…”

Rather, it ended in vain.

However, the curse that the last Demon King Army executive left on Aria was such a great curse that it was no exaggeration to say that this battle suffered the greatest damage.

In effect, one force called the Saintess had disappeared.

"Now all that's left is the Demon King… I don't know what will happen."

Valencia, who didn't know much about the Demon King, could only tell them to go ask Argent directly.

So…

"Go to Argent when all preparations are complete."

"Argent…?"

"Yes. Argent will know well. Where the Demon King is, and how to catch the Demon King."

That was all he could say right now.

‘Ah, no…’

This is really not it.

While I was starting to comfort myself, the thought that came to my mind was, do I have to weaken this curse this far?

‘No, that guy… what kind of curse did he put on me?’

When I touch it myself, nothing much changes, so it doesn't seem like a curse related to amplified senses.

When I touched Evan's hand, I felt a strange feeling as if I had become a female who loves males…

What should I say, really… it's like when you see something of your taste and imagine it, you feel a tingling sensation in your lower abdomen.

I only touched Evan, but I felt that, so I couldn't stand it.

If I keep living like this, it seems like it will be difficult to be with Evan, so I have to find a solution somehow…

'It's difficult…'

I sighed deeply, lying face-up on the bed.

Actually, as I said before, I decided to try it once and touched it for a while… but I quickly lost interest thinking this wasn't it.

I didn't touch it for that long, but I think I touched it enough to feel it.

I don't know the method, but even so, the sensation I feel is suspiciously weak, so one thing is certain.

Just from the fact that I don't feel much when I touch it, I could tell that the curse that the Succubus put on me wasn't a simple curse like amplified senses.

'Too bad.'

If it was that curse, the pain would have increased that much, so every time I healed someone, I would have felt pleasure that was incomparable to what I had felt so far.

To be honest, it's not like I didn't expect it…

Ahem…

‘Ugh… then what is it really…?’

But to say that she cast another curse… she wasn't the type to cast another curse, so it didn't make sense.

That's because I know best that she's not the type to cast other curses besides this kind of curse.

I know her well… but if that's not it, then there's no point in knowing her well, right?

‘What the hell did that guy put on me…?’

It's absurd…

She should have at least told me before leaving.

Anyway, Succubus are all rude.

Sigh.

Curse...? (Intermission)

In the end, without uncovering anything about the curse, we started moving to find the location of the Trial of Courage.

The only fortunate thing was that Valencia was right about there being a resident who knew the local geography well.

I didn't know because it wasn't in the game, but I really didn't expect them to actually exist…

'He really found it…'

Even while looking at the map of this area, I was purely amazed.

The map was almost identical to the one I saw in the game. For me, who had spent countless hours mastering the game and could pinpoint locations just by looking at the map, finding the location was no longer difficult.

'Once we finish the Trial of Courage, is the only thing left really the Demon King…?'

Now, the only thing left is the Demon King.

We need to subjugate the Demon King as soon as possible, so it would be best to finish the Trial as quickly as possible.

Evan had become incomparably stronger than at the beginning, but he hadn't undergone his final awakening yet, so subjugating the Demon King was impossible.

Moreover, now subjugating the Demon King wasn't the only problem; there was an even bigger issue.

'Now it's really a time attack…'

The fight against the Demon King had completely turned into a time attack.

Now that all the Demon King Army executives had been defeated, there was a possibility that the monster would become alarmed and attack first.

It might seem like it doesn't have much intelligence, but like a Demon King, it is highly intelligent and very wise.

'However… from its perspective, it's probably still too early.'

In the game, it basically only reveals itself as the final boss after you've finished about third grade, but surprisingly, we're still only in second grade.

It probably figured that it couldn't act rashly, even if Evan hadn't completed his final awakening, because it hadn't fully recovered its power.

And in the game, there's an extremely low probability of this happening, so there's usually no need to worry…

'But this is reality.'

In the game, if it just attacked, the only downside was that you couldn't load and would see the ending, but you could just reload the file and it would be fine. But this is reality.

If you die, there's no save or load, you just die.

To prevent that from happening, it was essential to undergo the Trial of Courage as quickly as possible, so that Evan could handle it even if such a thing happened.

Because he changes after receiving it.

I didn't know what kind of Trial the Trial of Courage would give, or how much Evan would grow from that Trial, but…

"...Are you sure it's okay to wander around…?"

Stella, seeing me so insistent on finding the Trial of Courage, asked with a worried expression.

Not only Stella, but everyone who was with me was worried about me.

Just a few days ago, I had my body stolen by the Succubus Queen, my limbs were cut off, and I was cursed, so they were very worried.

Well… I appreciate the concern…

'But I can't just keep saying "I don't want to wander around because of the curse, waah" forever.'

Well, wandering around doesn't make my whole body tingle or give me strange sensations of pleasure.

It seems that my curse only activates when it's 'limited' to other people.

Even so, it's still an absurd curse.

A curse that makes you feel sexual sensations just by touching someone, it's clearly trying to turn me into a pleasure-crazed pervert.

'If it was going to make me such a pervert, it should have amplified my senses for sure.'

If my senses were amplified, the pain I feel would also be amplified, so it probably decided that wouldn't work and changed it to a different curse.

The Succubus Queen is capable of that.

Of course, she doesn't know my tastes, but she probably judged me to be a very holy Saintess with a strong spirit.

She probably judged that after seeing that I didn't surrender to any pain.

Well, considering what I've done so far, it's a natural judgment.

After seeing my relationship with Evan, and after checking everything so far, she probably judged that it was impossible to break me with sensory amplification, so it would be better to use Evan.

Driving someone with a strong spirit into a corner by using the people around them.

It's definitely a reasonable judgment.

If I were really a Saintess from a fairy tale or the Bible, trying to break me by using Evan would be the closest thing to the right answer.

In fact, for this girl "Aria" that I'm playing, it's the most shocking method.

Only…

'Too bad, too bad…'

The reality is that I'm just a crazy bitch who wanted sensory amplification.

In a way, the Succubus Queen was really amazing.

She didn't intentionally do it, but the result was that she didn't give me any particular advantages while simultaneously confusing me mentally.

'Ugh…'

Even now, it's hard to walk with Evan, so I'm walking a little further away.

Just being with Evan makes my body heat up and I can't stand it.

Evan seems to be feeling sorry for me, thinking that I hate him.

I'm sorry, but this isn't the kind of thing I can explain… As it's limited to humans, the curse is much… unbelievably powerful.

I'm barely holding on with Holy Power, otherwise I would have lost my mind and attacked Evan, Stella, or Uriel.

Not being attacked, but me attacking them directly.

What's even more absurd is that this curse isn't limited to just one person.

It's on everyone who's close to me, in other words, everyone in the Hero party.

She's really meticulous.

'That's absolutely not allowed…'

It's not a question of whether I'll just let it go because I think it's because of the curse.

I just can't stand the thought of me doing such a thing…

I absolutely can't stand it.

"By the way, Aria."

"[Y-Yes?!]"

Ah, oops.

Was I too flustered?

Evan seemed startled by my flustered Thought-form and blinked, then asked cautiously.

"Are you sure this is the right place?"

"[Yes, it is.]"

"But this is…"

I know.

This is…

"That… a valley…"

The Cliff of Lament.

The snow created by the 'Beast of Freezing Cold that Calls for the End' had melted and disappeared, so it had become an ordinary cliff, but they seemed to not understand why we had suddenly come to this place.

Well, of course.

"[The Trial of Courage is in this place.]"

Because this is the right place.

"Eeeeh?!"

"That's a really surprising fact. Can I go back?"

"…"

Why is everyone reacting like that?

"Um… Aria?"

"[Yes?]"

"D-Do you know how to get in…?"

That's already decided.

You can tell just by the name Trial of Courage.

"[You just have to jump off.]"

You won't die if you jump.

It's a Trial, there's no way you'd die from falling, that would be a really stupid dungeon.

Of course, there's ancient magic to prevent falls below.

The only reason they haven't found it until now is how can you find the exact location in this wide Cliff of Lament and jump into the area where the dungeon exists?

And that's…

'I can see it, I can see it~'

It's a sad story for the developers who prepared the trick, but I can see that bridge very well.

For me, who uses Holy Power to step around and understand the surroundings, there's no way I can't see this bridge.

If you know the approximate location in the wide Cliff of Lament through the map, finding the invisible bridge is nothing.

"[It's here.]"

The diving spot for jumping off is made up of an invisible bridge.

In the game, if you find the exact location and walk into the air, you can climb onto the invisible bridge.

If you jump off, you'll fall for a long time and eventually arrive at the Trial of Courage.

In other words,

"Y-You want us to jump off here…"

"Ah, haha…"

"Wow…"

Evan, Uriel, and Stella looked at me with complicated expressions, wondering if they really had to jump off.

Don't you believe me?

Don't you believe what I'm saying?

I can't help it… I have to show you…

If you don't believe me, you'll see my corpse explode and die.

I went up onto the bridge.

"A-Aria?!"

"Noooo… Eeeh?"

Everyone was flustered as they watched me standing confidently in the air.

I knew it, no one believed me.

"[Come when you're ready. I'll go first.]"

I said that and jumped off.

What a bunch of cowards.

Invisible paths are such a common and cliché element.

'No, was that only the case where I was?'

Anyway, even so, seeing the Hero party not being able to jump off here, they must all be chicken.

It seems that the nickname of our Hero party should now be 'Shelter for Super Cowards'.

1 - Trial of Courage...?

After throwing myself into the deep darkness for what felt like dozens of seconds, I began to slow down as I approached the ground.

By the time I reached the bottom, my speed had completely diminished, allowing me to land safely as if in zero gravity.

‘Hmm.’

That's a bit disappointing.

If the ancient magic doesn't work...

‘Ah, then the others would die.’

Can't have that.

I might just be looking for a thrill, but it could cause lasting mental anguish for the others, so it's best not to entertain such unsettling thoughts.

‘They're coming down soon.’

I can feel them descending, having jumped shortly after me.

Hmm, maybe we should change 'Shelter for Super Cowards' to 'Shelter for Cowards.'

Super cowards wouldn't even have considered jumping.

"Whoa…! I, it really is slowing down…"

"Phew…"

"T, that's a relief…"

Stella, Evan, and Uriel muttered as they landed.

"[Welcome,]" I said with a grin, but they didn't seem too pleased.

"It really is 'Trial of Courage' in name and deed. How are we supposed to get back up?"

"[You'll be sent back up if you clear the Trial. Probably,]" I replied.

"It's amazing how you know these things sometimes…"

Stella looked at me suspiciously, but what could I do?

This information is only known to me, after all… I've been brushing it off as a Divine Revelation, but I don't know how long that'll last.

I might have to reveal my true identity soon.

Even if that happens, I don't want to reveal who I really am…

‘Or do I?’

Well, unless there's a big reason I can't say, they're smart enough to realize I must have a reason for keeping quiet.

They're considerate and kind, so they probably won't ask even if they're curious.

I'd prefer it if things stayed that way.

"So there really is a Trial…"

Evan looked up at the Trial of Courage, sweating.

He didn't seem to expect this kind of Trial either.

‘Trial of Courage… a Trial that shows the current challenger what they need the most courage for, and tests whether they can overcome it or not…’

In fact, if you can overcome this Trial, you'll become so brave that you can handle almost anything with a yawn.

It's not called a Trial for nothing.

"[Shall we head in, then?]"

"W-wait a minute… let's rest a bit…"

Stella said, her face pale.

‘Ah, I didn't think about Stella.’

She may look like that, but she's a mage.

Unlike Evan and Uriel, who are swordsmen, and me, the Saintess, Stella is just a regular mage, so she's bound to get tired walking around like this.

That must be why she wants to rest…

‘If that's the case, why didn't she just fly…’

We didn't come here to fight, so why insist on walking?

"[Should I help you?]"

"N, no… I don't want to use Holy Power for something like this…"

Stella said, looking like she was about to throw up.

I don't know if she realizes how unconvincing she sounds with that expression.

Anyway, Stella's begging for a break, so I can't refuse.

Besides…

"[Indeed… when you enter the Trial, you'll have to face the situation you least want to face… or a situation that requires a great deal of courage, so it's best to prepare yourselves mentally in advance,]" I said.

I need to constantly tell myself that I can do it.

As for me… I don't know what kind of Trial I'll face, but considering I find even pain enjoyable, I doubt it'll be anything too difficult.

I feel surprisingly detached.

But the others might be different… so I decided to postpone entering the Trial.

After some time passed, Stella's complexion returned, and everyone finished preparing themselves.

We stepped into the Trial of Courage.

"A-are you sure this is okay…?"

"We're not going to die during the Trial, are we…? I'm so nervous after coming down that cliff…"

Everyone seems to have gone crazy after entering the deep underground.

It wasn't this bad even at the cliff where we got stranded in our first year.

Is it a natural reaction to falling into an even deeper place than that?

But the atmosphere felt more serious back then…

Besides…

'Only Evan and I fell back then…'

I can understand Stella and Uriel's reactions to some extent.

[…Those who have set foot in the Trial of Courage.]

As soon as we stepped inside, an ancient statue greeted us, its green eyes glowing.

[From now on, I shall test the courage you possess…]

At the statue's words, everyone swallowed nervously, their faces tense.

What kind of Trial will it be… can I really do it… I guess that's what they're thinking.

I'm just looking forward to seeing what kind of Trial it will be.

‘Please let it be something easy…’

In the game, the Trial was about writing down your resolutions, so it was a complete freebie, but this is reality.

If you go in for the Trial, you'll face the moment when you need the most courage.

When that will be… I can't figure it out no matter how hard I try.

How can you know that about yourself?

You only know when the situation arises.

So, all I can do is beg for something easy.

[I shall now begin the Trial.]

The moment the statue said that, a pillar of light rose where we were standing.

"[May you… take a step forward,]" I sent out a Thought-form, and the giant pillar of light engulfed us.

Then, I lost consciousness.

.

.

.

"Ugh…"

My consciousness flickered, and when I opened my eyes again, I saw an unfamiliar ceiling.

…

…

Huh?

An unfamiliar ceiling?

"What."

I sat up.

There's no way I should be able to open my eyes.

I shouldn't be able to hear either, but I can feel it instinctively.

The fact that I can hear.

And…

‘Th-this sound…’

I think I can hear the sound of someone showering in the distance, but is it just my imagination?

More importantly, where am I right now?

I quickly looked around.

In a luxurious room with low lighting, I was sitting on a large bed.

And…

‘Wh-what is this outfit?!’

I was wearing a thin outfit that barely covered my body, so revealing that you could see my underwear.

‘B-but my body hasn't grown much…’

Damn it.

If I'm wearing something like this, my body should at least have grown.

Ah, no, that's not it…

‘Wh-why am I here doing this?!’

I was genuinely flustered.

Where I am, what kind of clothes I'm wearing… why I'm here doing this.

And…

‘Wh-who the hell is showering over there!!!’

The shadow doesn't look like a woman at all.

It looks like a man with a good body.

At that moment, I sensed it.

No matter how I think about it, my situation is really…

Really, really, really, really screwed.

Really, utterly screwed.

‘R-run? Run away?!’

No matter how you look at it, this is that.

It's right before that!

I'm about to be done in!!!

‘If I run away…’

Wait a minute.

Courage…?

The moment when I need to muster courage…

The moment when I need to muster the most courage in my life…

…

…

‘Shit, was that it!!!!!’

I finally understood.

I'm about to be caught by Evan.

And the moment when I need to muster the most courage in my life is none other than…

‘Before having sex with Evan?!’

It's absurd.

If Stella, Uriel, or even Evan found out about this Trial, I wouldn't be surprised if I died of embarrassment on the spot.

As I sat on the bed, trembling and wondering what to do,

Click!

The door opened.

"Phew… sorry to keep you waiting, Aria."

A soft, mellow voice that tickled my ears.

I turned my head with trembling eyes.

A handsome white-haired man, whom I knew very well, was approaching me, barely covering his lower body with a bath towel.

"E-Evan…"

When I asked in a trembling voice, Evan scratched his head, trying to ease the awkward atmosphere, thinking I was nervous.

"I was too nervous… so I came out a little late… haha…"

"H-haha…"

I couldn't help but laugh awkwardly as well.

‘You son of a bitch……’

His body is unnecessarily good.

He has everything, and now he's trying to take me too.

‘I give up…’

Please save me, Trial.

Please… damn it…

I begged the Trial of Courage, but it was no use.

It seems I'm really screwed.

2 - Trial of Courage

What on earth was going on?

I looked up at Evan in front of me, beads of cold sweat trickling down my face.

'Judging by the fact that I can see...'

Could it be after I subjugated the Demon King?

Otherwise, there's no way to explain why I can see, so I have to assume that's the case.

More than anything...

'Considering the relationship between Evan and me, there's no other explanation...'

If so, should I assume this is the best-case scenario for the future?

Or is this just a scene the Trial Dungeon is showing me, the most anxious and fearful scenario I can imagine?

'Seriously, this is insane...!'

I just want to find the bastard who created this Trial Dungeon and give him a piece of my mind.

Even so, the moment they show me as the most courageous in my life isn't just any situation...!

'E-Evan and I are about to do it...!!'

What's even more absurd is that I'm already prepared, wearing only a gown that barely covers my body.

It's a ridiculous situation, but...

'Yeah... for me, it might be the moment I need the most courage in my life...'

I've always been confident when throwing myself into danger.

What humans fear most is the disappearance of their very existence due to death, and the pain that comes with it.

Both are terrible, but unfortunately, I don't have that kind of fear.

Since I don't die, I don't fear death, and I even find pleasure in the pain that comes with it. For me, the fear of death is essentially a meaningless illusion.

So, if there's a moment when I need the most courage...

'Heh, this is something else...'

I'm acknowledging the Trial Dungeon.

It's a strange moment, indeed.

"Aria?"

As I kept staring up at him, Evan gently approached me and took my hand.

I flinched, but since Evan and I are already lovers... or maybe even married, Evan didn't seem to mind.

'He's not the type to push things just because we're dating...'

I know Evan's personality well.

So, we've already done this countless times, right?

"Are you okay?"

He even stroked my forehead with one hand while holding my hand, seemingly unaware.

"You're the Saintess, so you shouldn't have a fever... but if you're sick, you have to tell me. We don't have to do it today."

Ah, no.

Um...

'Sh-should I... refuse...?'

I briefly considered it, but then a possibility flashed through my mind, and I closed my mouth tightly.

'This is... a Trial...'

And it's about whether I can accept having a relationship with Evan.

'Wh-what the heck...!'

The Trial of Courage is supposed to test whether I have the courage to move forward, no matter what happens, no matter what fearful situation arises.

I mean, it's not like I wanted pleasure or pain that's incomparable to anything I've experienced, and it's not like I'm particularly afraid of anything, so I know there's no suitable Trial to give me.

But this is too much...!!

"I, I..."

How should I answer?

Seeing my hesitation, Evan made a quick decision and chuckled.

"I guess it's hard for you right now."

"Evan...?"

"I'm sorry. I think I was only thinking about myself."

Evan said that with the awkward smile I often saw on his face.

The clumsy side he always showed me.

Even though he had already subjugated the Demon King and seemed to have grown into a handsome man after quite some time, he didn't feel unfamiliar.

'That's the Evan I know.'

An unnecessarily kind Hero.

A cliché-ridden guy with a Hero's personality that seems straight out of a textbook, but that's why I can't hate him.

A foolish guy who was willing to give up his own life to save me.

And I didn't dislike that about Evan.

During the time we spent together... I didn't care who I used to be anymore, and there was no reason for me to return to a place where no one was waiting for me.

The traces I left behind as 'Aria' in this world had come back to me so strongly.

The scales in my heart were now tilting towards this world, not the real world.

'Ah... I see.'

What the Trial of Courage is showing me.

At first, I wondered what was going on, but now I understand why this Trial came to me as the Trial of Courage.

This Trial wasn't just telling me to have a physical relationship with Evan.

I thought it was a Trial about my possible aversion or fear of having a relationship with a man, since I used to be a man, and even though I've lived as the Saintess for a considerable amount of time, that doesn't mean I wouldn't have those feelings.

But that wasn't it.

'I... couldn't decide.'

I was in an ambiguous state.

I hadn't properly thought about the feelings Evan had shown me.

I hadn't thought about what my own feelings were, or what feelings I had for Evan.

That's why this Trial was showing me this situation.

As if telling me to make up my mind now.

That was the "courage" I needed to have now.

'What's so difficult about it?'

I already know what's more important to me now, don't I?

I don't want to give up this relationship.

Stella, Uriel, and the people around me, and the people of the Holy Kingdom too.

I don't want this world I live in to be destroyed.

At first, I lived just to feel good and not die.

But as I met many people and experienced many things, I realized that I was slowly changing.

So, there's only one thing I need to do now.

Don't run away.

Fight back.

"Wait a minute..."

I grabbed Evan's hand as he was about to lie down on the bed as if running away.

"A-Aria?"

Then, I carefully lifted it up.

'Was Evan's hand like this?'

Maybe it's different now since more time has passed since then.

But even though this Evan in front of me isn't real...

'I hope my sincerity gets through.'

I looked at Evan and slowly moved closer.

"A-Aria?"

Evan, who was sitting on the bed, looked flustered as I suddenly got closer.

It was only natural since I had never been so proactive before.

In fact, it was obvious that both Evan and I had a hard time approaching each other, so Evan's reaction didn't seem strange at all.

"Evan..."

A delicate and wistful voice, one that was hard to believe came from me, echoed in the room.

What should I do to show my feelings?

It was simple.

I looked up at Evan.

I slowly approached his slightly parted lips, as if he was flustered.

As I got closer, I wrapped my arms around Evan, feeling his firm back.

It was a sign of training.

Did he not stop training even after subjugating the Demon King? I smiled and moved even closer.

"W-wait a minute... aren't we too close...?!"

What.

Is he making a fuss about being close with just this much?

Wasn't he planning on doing something even worse than this from now on?

"Weren't you planning on doing something even worse...?"

"Ugh... th-that's..."

Evan turned his head away.

"But I... we were supposed to make a baby today... and..."

"You're making excuses, unlike you."

Oh, what should I do?

Why is he so cute?

I didn't expect this cute reaction, but seeing his face flushed and him rambling, I can't help but feel overwhelmed.

'I, I really like him.'

What should I say... I suddenly realized that.

There's no more hesitation.

"Evan."

I said words that I never thought I would say in my life.

"I love you."

I haven't even said that to the real him yet.

I never thought I would say these words in a Trial.

Why is that?

'Ah...'

I feel dizzy after saying those words.

'Evan...♡'

An unknown sensation flowed through my entire body.

I felt a sticky sensation from below.

"...Aria."

Evan, after confirming my sincerity, narrowed his eyes and slowly kissed me.

There was no reason to refuse.

I kissed Evan as he was...

...

...

...

"...Huh?"

When I came to my senses, I was back where we had started the Trial.

My whole body was hot, and the strange sticky sensation was still there, but I was sure that I had returned.

I got up from my seat with a dazed expression.

Was it all a wet dream ending?

Is this for real??

Really???

'No.'

No, of course, I knew that the situation was a dream.

But still, cutting it off at that moment was too much, you son of a bitch.

"[You, you son of a bitch!!!]"

Kaaaaaah!!

I thrashed around in a frenzy, shaking my body from side to side.

I should be grateful that no one woke up.

3 - Trial of Courage

Trial of Courage.

A simple trial that only tests the courage of the one undergoing it. Naturally, failure here doesn't result in the trial-taker's death.

Of course, just because it doesn't take lives doesn't mean it's easy. It usually involves an experience that is mentally exhausting, even traumatizing.

If one's mental fortitude isn't strong enough to overcome it, their mind will break down before they can pass the Trial, rendering them useless.

If the Trial of Strength simply tests the trial-taker's strength through a golem, the Trial of Wisdom drops them into a world of illusion, testing their ability to understand the situation they are in and how to act.

And the Trial of Courage… as the name suggests, it brings the moment when the trial-taker needs the most courage from a future where all possibilities exist and tests them.

Naturally, the situation will be urgent and desperate.

In a way, it could be called a mentally lethal Trial.

"… Ugh…"

Evan opened his eyes.

'Kh… Haa…'

His whole body ached.

His vision was blurry and stained red, and his head felt like it was about to split open.

He felt intense pain all over his body, and his arms and legs wouldn't move as he wished.

“Ah…”

Supporting himself with the Holy Sword, he managed to rise to his feet, and his surroundings slowly came into view.

Collapsed ruins, withered land… a sky as dark as pitch.

An overwhelming Demonic energy that inspired despair.

‘Demon King.’

Evan looked around with trembling eyes.

Countless people lay on the ground as gruesome corpses.

And…

‘This is…’

A familiar scene.

Just by looking at the collapsed buildings, Evan could tell where he was.

‘The Academy…?!’

Only then did Evan understand the situation.

Stopping the Demon King was impossible.

Unable to halt its advance, it had finally reached the Academy in the heart of the Empire, devouring even the students.

Chunks of flesh and pieces of organs scattered about, unable to find their owners, blood splattered everywhere, and corpses mangled beyond recognition.

Only the torn Academy uniforms indicated that the victims were Academy students.

“Ugh…”

Evan had seen many corpses before.

Mostly ones he didn't want to see… He had seen all sorts of terrible sights with Aria dying, but this was too much.

‘How… could this…!’

- … Evan, are you awake…?

“Estel…?”

- I'm glad you're alive… but you've been unconscious for too long…

Estel's voice was filled with pity.

“What, what happened…?”

- The Demon King has become uncontrollably strong. The Demon King, who spread throughout the world, has destroyed all the countries.

“…”

- Humanity, no, the world is on the verge of destruction.

The only reason this place still remained was because Argen Isis, one of the strongest archmages, was protecting it.

But even that was not enough to overcome the Demon King's overwhelming power.

“Then…”

- You know it too, right? It's just us now.

Stella, Uriel… everyone at the Academy.

Valencia too…

Even Argen…

“Aria…”

What happened to Aria?

The thought suddenly occurred to Evan, and he asked Estel.

However,

- Aria… was devoured… into that abyss of hell.

The abyss of hell.

In effect, it meant that she had been eaten by the Demon King.

Even the Saintess, with her powerful Holy Power, was no match for the Demon King who had swallowed the continent.

“Ah…”

Evan wore a blank expression.

‘What is this…’

Evan gripped the sword tightly.

There was nothing more he could do.

It was as if the situation was telling him that.

‘Is this hell…?’

The moment the Demon King invaded this place, we missed the initial response, giving the Demon King time to grow.

Unlike the Demon realm, where there was almost nothing to eat, this place was a world full of life, with things for the Demon King to consume in order to grow.

The Demon King devoured life in an instant, then devoured even the continent, and relentlessly stretched out, finally invading the continent where humans lived.

It was far from enough to stop the Demon King, who had already grown strong.

We were pushed back, pushed back, and pushed back again.

Only then did Evan begin to grasp the situation properly.

In that short time, humanity had come to an end.

Evan gritted his teeth.

‘What can I do?’

What could he do in this situation?

‘Goddess…’

Evan felt like offering a prayer.

Was this situation, this catastrophe, what she had wanted?

‘Of course not.’

Despair filled Evan's eyes.

His body was battered and bruised, and although he had magic power left, he didn't think he could defeat the Demon King with it.

It was a complete defeat.

Humanity's defeat.

Hope had faded.

Evan hung his head low.

- Evan…?

“I'm sorry, Estel… I… don't think I can save the world…”

And then he collapsed on the spot.

Normally, he would have rushed towards the Demon King, even knowing that it meant certain death.

But now, he didn't want to do anything.

Whether he died here now or later, it was all the same in the end, and nothing would come of wielding this meager amount of magic power.

‘If only I had achieved complete awakening…’

The final awakening.

If he had achieved the final awakening, which was no different from ascending to the realm of a demigod… could he have stopped the Demon King?

It was the first time he had ever felt so resentful of his own incompetence.

Although it would be the last.

‘Aria…’

Aria suddenly came to mind.

What had happened to Aria?

He remembered her being devoured, but Aria was immortal and wouldn't normally die.

No, perhaps even if she was the Saintess, as long as her opponent was the Demon King, who was at the opposite end of the spectrum…

‘No matter how much light there is… against strong darkness…’

Of course, having a small light in the pitch-black darkness was completely different from having none, but even that became meaningless if the light became too small.

She would be constantly eroded and eventually completely devoured by the Demon King and die.

Even if she lost all her Holy Power, she would come back to life as long as her Holy Power welled up again.

She was probably repeating death infinitely.

If Aria gave up there… she would face complete death by ceasing to think.

But if it hadn't been long since she was devoured…

“Yeah… rather than doing nothing…”

Evan rose from his spot.

At least he wanted to see Aria.

Even if she had been devoured, Aria might still be alive.

The thought gave him strength in his legs.

Barely managing to stand up, Evan moved his trembling legs towards where the Demon King was.

One step, two steps.

The Demon King was slowly approaching Evan, and Evan was approaching the Demon King, so the two were rapidly closing the distance.

The closer he got, the more Evan felt something was wrong.

[…Van……ge…t…ou…]

“This voice…”

There was only one person who could send such a voice.

Evan rushed towards the direction of the voice.

[Ev… voi… he…ar…]

“Aria! Aria!!!”

The closer he got, the more he felt the dense Demonic energy pressing down on his body.

Demonic energy so thick that ordinary people would have their bodies melted away just by being here.

But Evan couldn't stop.

Estel shouted at Evan, who was running aimlessly towards the voice.

- Evan? Evan?! What are you doing…!

“Aria, Aria is alive!”

No sooner had he said that than the Demon King's massive body appeared.

Seeing it, Evan swallowed hard.

Whether he approached or not, the Demon King was only focused on increasing its size.

“Aria is… where…”

Evan's eyes gleamed as he looked around.

A place where faint Holy Power was concentrated.

Seeing the Holy Power leaking out little by little, Evan rushed towards it.

- It's, it's dangerous to go near…!

Estel cried out urgently, but Evan had no intention of backing down.

If not now, there would be no chance.

Evan instinctively knew that.

“Estel, get a grip…! I'm going to gather my strength now…!”

- What?!

Evan said that and gathered his magic power.

Then, the Holy Sword converted it into Holy Power, and a pure white light burst forth.

“Give Aria… back…!!”

Evan swung the Holy Sword, which contained most of his power, accurately towards the place where he felt the Holy Power.

At that moment,

Splat!

The Demon King's body burst open.

- …?

The Demon King reacted.

And…

“[E… van…]”

Inside, Aria, who was being eroded by Demonic energy and dying, was smiling weakly.

“[You're finally… looking at me…]”

“Ah…”

Aria was still alive.

4 - Trial of Courage

“Kuh…!”

Aria's condition was, to put it mildly, not good.

Evan wanted to pull Aria out of the Demon King's body right away, but he had used up a lot of his strength in the previous attack.

Fortunately, even the Demon King was weak against Holy Power, so when attacked with powerful Holy Power, it had trouble regenerating that area.

If that was all, it would have quickly recovered with more overwhelming Demonic energy, but it was different now.

Aria was directly scattering Holy Power around inside the body, interfering with the recovery, so it was able to maintain its condition.

"I'll get you out of here soon…!"

The best thing to do is to get Aria out of here first.

Evan judged so, but Aria answered with a small smile.

“[Please don't, Evan.]”

“… Aria?”

“[Even if you save me here, the Demon King will still be here. Or rather, it will become even stronger. If even I, who am interfering with Holy Power, disappear… that is.]”

Evan's expression hardened at Aria's words.

She was right.

In the first place, it was difficult to get her out, and even if he did, there was no other way to stop the Demon King, so all they could do was watch the world perish with their own eyes.

But… so what?

"Are you saying we should give up like this?! Leave you… leave you there and run away…?!"

Evan gritted his teeth and shouted at Aria.

He couldn't do that.

There was nowhere to run anyway.

The continent was being devoured by the Demon King.

Soon, the Demon King, who had rapidly increased its power, would devour the entire continent, and could cross the ocean to other continents.

In other words, it was only a matter of time before the world would be destroyed.

“[… Calm down, Evan.]”

Aria replied to Evan, who was bursting with resentment, with a sad Thought-form.

It wasn't to insult his will to save at least the person he loved, since there was nothing more he could do.

Aria had called him here to talk about the last resort.

“[There is… a way.]”

There is a way.

At those words, Evan, who had been crying and despairing, raised his head and looked at Aria.

“[I can't do it alone. Evan… and whether this succeeds or fails, you and I will probably die. Not even our souls will be left… we won't even go to the afterlife and will disappear as we are.]”

Evan's eyes widened at that.

He could see why Aria had called him here.

Because it was something she couldn't do alone, and to get his consent.

Aria… was willing to choose a path of complete annihilation, with no future, to save everyone living in this world.

“[What will you do…?]”

Aria's question echoed in Evan's ears.

What to do.

Would he try a way to save this world by sacrificing his life with her, or would he barely preserve his ugly life and face death together when the world took its last breath?

'Ah…'

Evan sensed it.

This world exists to see his will and the courage to carry it out.

But it was definitely a world with possibilities.

Evan looked down at his hands.

He didn't think this place was virtual.

Everything felt so real.

The places wounded by the Demon King still felt unbearably painful.

Annihilation.

Evan knew what that word meant.

Not just the death of the body, but the death of the soul itself.

What humans fear more than the pain of death is the disappearance of their very existence.

Fear of the unknown, what happens when I disappear… that unknown evokes fear of death.

But…

Evan clenched his fist.

'If I'm going to die whether I step up or not…'

Walk the path where hope exists.

Or face the ending of being violated by the Demon King.

The path to take was decided from the beginning.

“… I'll do it.”

Evan decided.

And he understood.

That this place would be his grave.

And he believed that his sacrifice would allow future generations to rebuild this empire, and even this world.

“[… Are you really okay with this? If you use this method…]”

“You know, Aria.”

Evan smiled.

Although he couldn't keep his promise to protect Aria.

But Evan wasn't so weak that he would abandon his duty because he couldn't keep such a personal promise.

He had always thought that even if he failed to protect Aria, he had to fulfill his duty as the Hero.

Perhaps that's why he was chosen by the Holy Sword and became the Hero.

He was just unbearably angry at himself.

That this situation… that the reality that Aria's attempt to die together, sacrificing her own life, was the last resort.

'At least… if only I could die alone…'

He had promised to make Aria happy.

Far from making her happy, he had made her live a life stained with pain and sacrifice, and even to the end…

Did he deserve to love Aria, who was being completely deprived of the opportunity to be happy?

No.

No matter how he thought about it, he didn't.

Evan made a pitiful expression.

“… I'm sorry.”

Evan reached out his hand.

He stroked Aria's hair, who was still unable to open her eyes.

“[… You don't have to be sorry, Evan…]”

Why did it have to be like this?

Evan knew the answer to that.

It was a simple answer.

Because he was weak.

Because he was weaker than the Demon King who had devoured this world.

There was only one way.

Only one way.

'Even if I burn my whole life… is it not enough?'

Evan hung his head.

He wanted Aria to live.

Was even that too much to ask?

Evan gritted his teeth.

Really, is there really no way?

Really…

Do we all have to die like this…

“[… Evan…?]”

…

…

Strange.

Aria's Thought-form was clearly audible.

It should have been a small, fading Thought-form, but what happened?

It was then.

"This is…"

Light was bursting out of the necklace around Evan's neck, who had been hanging his head.

This was… the Necklace of Inheritance, wasn't it?

A necklace with the Thought-form of past Heroes sleeping inside.

The Holy Power that was left had been used up when he was subjugating the Magic beast, so it was a necklace with nothing left but Thought-form.

'How… did…'

Evan's thoughts didn't last long.

The light that suddenly burst out of the necklace blocked his vision.

Soon, the light spread out greatly and covered the world that seemed so real.

In the completely white world, Evan entrusted himself to the gradually fading senses.

[… Serious error occurred in the Trial.]

[Thought-form intrusion, warning.]

[……]

[Warning… warning…]

It was the moment when he was about to come to his senses at the alarm ringing in his head.

"You can stay still."

Evan's body stiffened at the voice that calmed him down.

A familiar voice he had heard somewhere.

Evan could instinctively recognize who this voice belonged to.

“… Me…?”

It was his own voice.

The previous Hero he had met when he regained some of his memories not long ago.

The Hero, who he didn't know why he looked like himself, was standing in front of him.

"Finally, this time has come."

Soon, his vision completely disappeared, and Evan opened his closed eyes again.

What he saw was a completely white space.

And…

"Nice to meet you, Evan."

The previous Hero in the necklace.

No,

"Should I call you the future me? Or should I call you the past me?"

The Hero continued with such incomprehensible words and closed his eyes slightly.

"You couldn't hear everything back then."

"That's because you weren't qualified back then. I didn't expect you to grow during the Trial."

The Hero smiled.

"This must be all thanks to her. She's really… an amazing child."

She must be referring to Aria.

But Evan still couldn't understand what he was saying.

"The memories must have been passed on unconsciously. Maybe… the memories that sometimes come to mind made you uncomfortable."

“… So that was your doing.”

"Yes. And… now all the conditions are met."

A Hero with a shabby appearance, but a strange man who could instinctively know that he was his future self.

"I'll explain everything from now on."

What happened.

And…

"What happened to Aria."

Why he came to exist in the necklace.

5 - Trial of Courage

"Hmm. It's been a while since I've seen myself like this."

A shaggy beard, a face withered and aged by hardship.

According to him, even though there wasn't much of an age difference, he looked decades older on the outside.

"This version of me...?"

"And it's also a strange feeling. I'm clearly the same person, yet... how different can we be?"

'What is he talking about...'

He was clearly saying he was looking at himself, but he was seeing him differently from how he saw himself, which Evan couldn't understand at all.

"..."

But now wasn't the time to talk about such things.

"When does the story begin?"

"Right... it's best to start the story soon. We don't have much time."

The man made a wistful expression and then began to explain.

About the story of a man he didn't want to know, but had to know.

Evan stared blankly at the man in front of him.

"You want me to believe that...?"

An expression of shock as if he couldn't believe it.

Even so, Evan, having heard the story of a future he didn't want to imagine, was at a loss for words.

"It couldn't be helped. Your mental strength had to be strong in order for you to fully accept these memories."

The man, no.

"Are you... alright?"

Himself.

Evan could be sure that what was in front of him was himself.

The stories he told himself were all absurd, but that was why he had to believe them.

Otherwise, it would be impossible to explain the abnormal power he possessed and the feeling of memories that didn't come to mind.

"History has already been repeated once. Only for this moment."

The Future Hero who had lost everything.

Who would want to believe that it was himself?

But Evan believed it.

No, he had to believe it.

"You'd understand, right? Why I acted this way."

"... Yeah, I can't not know."

The man in front of him was definitely himself.

That's what his mind was telling him.

He was certain that if it was himself who had finished thinking about Aria, he would have done the same.

"It's a relief, though. I was worried that the future might change drastically just by the existence of the Necklace of Inheritance changing."

Of course, the future had changed because he had intervened.

"Originally, that Magic beast in that bitter cold wouldn't have died like that. It would have been incredibly difficult to catch."

It resulted in countless sacrifices.

And Aria had once again sacrificed herself to undo those sacrifices, but.

As Future Evan, it was a terrible memory he never wanted to think about again.

The Saintess who died and was resurrected thousands of times to save thousands of people.

Of course, because she saved them all at once, he didn't know until then that it was an absurd thing to do.

Aria endured the pain as if it were natural.

He knew she had performed a miracle, but he had no idea how heavy a burden Aria had taken on with that miracle.

That's why he regretted it.

He couldn't stand how disgusting he was.

So, by drawing out all the power remaining in the Necklace of Inheritance, he drew out the Holy Power remaining in himself and made the current Evan use a technique that he couldn't use.

It was all his doing.

"Aria..."

"Yes. Aria dies. Due to the Demon King who attacked while we were off guard... that is."

Evan recalled the future shown in the Trial of Courage he had just undergone.

Of course, Future Evan explained that the future was the worst of the worst, but it was still dizzying to think about.

No, if you look at it from the point of view of dying with Aria, it would be more comfortable than being sent alone to sacrifice yourself.

But in the end, the world was destroyed anyway.

The future where the Demon King launches a surprise attack.

So quickly were his subordinates defeated that the Demon King risked his life to cross over to the continent early and build up his power.

As soon as he recognized the Demonic energy, he moved to that place, but it was already too late.

The Demon King recovered his power and tried to destroy the world.

The Future Evan, who had not awakened, defeated the Demon King with the gap created by Aria's sacrifice.

"I wanted to change this present."

The Future Evan, who had belatedly completed his awakening due to Aria's death, made a wish while immersed in guilt and sorrow.

To be able to go back to the past with the memories of the present.

But the Goddess, who said she would grant all wishes, could not accept the offer.

Sending him back to the past, especially with all these memories, was impossible with her power.

If that were possible, she wouldn't have been able to do anything until the situation got this bad, the Goddess said in a sad voice.

Hope was dashed.

He looked for a way to return to the past.

He constantly searched for and researched ways to return to the past, borrowing the power of Stella, who had become a great mage of space.

If he could go back to the moment Aria disappeared and beat the Demon King instead, he felt like he could be satisfied.

The desire to marry Aria, to be connected to each other, didn't matter.

As long as Aria was alive, that was enough.

"... I remembered it there."

Necklace of Inheritance.

This Necklace, made with ancient and supreme magic, can contain Thought-forms in a space that transcends time and space.

Until now, the Thought-forms of past Heroes had flowed in and were dormant.

This was a place where only Heroes could enter.

But…

'I'm… a Hero…'

Evan, he was a Hero.

The moment he recognized that, Evan made a wish.

To be able to enter the Necklace with all the memories of the present and all the power he possessed.

- Evan…

At that time, the Goddess called his name in a sad voice.

But Evan had already made up his mind.

This world without Aria had no meaning.

That's how he ended up inside the Necklace.

"Now all the conditions are met."

The mental maturity of the current Evan.

The three Relics collected by Aria.

The memories of the future that he possessed.

Everything needed to avoid being defeated by the Demon King was gathered.

He had finished laying the foundation for a new, undetermined future where Aria would not die.

Future Evan turned his head and faced the current Evan with a serious expression.

"Listen carefully, me."

"..."

"Once you complete this Trial, you will... take all of my memories. And you will complete your final awakening."

Evan's eyes widened at those words.

Originally, all of this was due to the fact that he was defeated because he had not completed his final awakening due to the Demon King's early attack.

If he knew what was going to happen and completed his final awakening, it meant that he could defeat the Demon King in reverse.

"Don't worry about your personality changing. You are you and I am me."

"Yeah. I don't care. As long as I can save Aria."

"... Right. That's not important."

Future Evan chuckled at the current Evan's words.

"I'll explain what to do from now on."

What to do was simple.

"Strike first."

"What?"

"You can't lose to the Demon King once you've completed your final awakening. Especially that Demon King who is still building up his power in the Demon realm."

If he was already swallowing up the continent, it would be a fight where you would have to be prepared to die together, but if he was still recovering his power in the Demon realm, there was no need to worry at all.

So just go and slice up the Demon King.

That's it.

Future Evan was saying that.

Evan blinked at the ridiculous plan.

"Really... is that all I have to do?"

Future Evan continued, as if asking the obvious.

"Yes. You'll know the location and how to get to the Demon realm if you accept all my memories."

"You…"

Evan looked up at his future self with a trembling voice.

Future Evan chuckled and raised his hand.

"I'm definitely myself... but you look so young. Is this what it feels like to raise a disciple?"

"..."

"Please."

Please save Aria.

Aria, who only knows how to sacrifice herself.

Please make that poor child happy.

"I believe that you... can definitely do it, that you will definitely do well."

""Because I'm me.""

With those words, Future Evan disappeared.

Soon after,

Crackle…!

"..."

The world loses its shape.

The pure white space cracked and split, and then an even more intense light covered Evan.

Evan entrusted himself to the light and closed his eyes, accepting the memories flowing into his head.

Trial of Courage (Intermission)

When I came to, I was back at the Trial grounds where I had thrown myself.

"..."

Evan stared blankly at the high ceiling, seeing nothing.

As he sorted through the dizzying memories flooding his mind, Evan organized what he needed to do.

'Aria...'

Aria was in all his memories.

Until the very end, with the people and friends of the whole world, and...

'To save me...'

The memory of her sacrificing her life to save him.

Evan understood why he shed tears every time he awakened.

Everything, including the memories of his future self, had become completely his own.

- Evan... you...

Estel immediately sensed that something was different about Evan.

The magic power had increased to an extent incomparable to before the Trial, and there was a different atmosphere...

- This power is...

Estel's eyes widened.

The Holy Sword had changed.

As its user, Evan, achieved his final awakening, the weapon had also evolved to match him.

- Could it be...

"You're right, Estel."

He had succeeded in his final awakening.

And...

"I know what I have to do."

To defeat the Demon King.

Evan rose from his spot.

There was no time to delay.

He had to head to the Demon realm.

"...Hasn't everyone woken up yet?"

- No, wait... Didn't Aria wake up...?

At Estel's words, Aria flinched.

Evan didn't miss it.

No, he couldn't miss it.

Having completed his awakening, if he couldn't even perceive such a small movement, he would have to return the title of awakened Hero.

But...

'She wants to hide it.'

Evan thought that Aria wanted to hide the fact that she was awake.

He didn't know why, but he wasn't the type to pry into something she wanted to hide, so Evan pretended not to notice and replied to Estel.

"Probably not. If it were Aria, she would have said she was awake..."

- Is that so...?

Perhaps thinking there was some truth in Evan's words, Estel didn't pay any more attention to Aria.

However, even Evan, with his superhuman senses, had missed something.

'Ugh...'

She was too embarrassed to show how excited she was.

If he had examined Aria's body more closely, he would have noticed not only the exposed vulva on her abdomen, a trace of the Succubus Queen's curse, but also something flowing down below.

But he didn't, because he realized Aria wanted to hide it and immediately turned his head away.

Aria probably hoped he would never find out.

"..."

Stella and Uriel were speechless for a while.

What happened inside must have been different for each of them, so there might have been stories to tell, but they had experienced such shocking things that they couldn't bring themselves to open their mouths.

'Hmm.'

Having barely calmed myself down, I leaned back against the backrest as if nothing had happened and let out a sigh.

I couldn't stick close to Evan, lest the curse flare up again.

'Damn curse...'

I hope that Trial wasn't triggered by the curse.

...

That couldn't be the case.

Even though the Succubus Queen hadn't fully completed her awakening and left a curse that I, as the Saintess, couldn't undo, the Trial and the curse were distinctly different.

Besides, the curse hadn't been triggered by being close to Evan or touching him during the Trial, so there was even less chance that the Trial was caused by the curse.

But...

'Did I, did I really try to do it with Evan...?'

When I was undergoing the Trial, even though I knew it was a Trial, it was impossible to approach it thinking, 'It's just a Trial, so it doesn't matter.'

No matter how realistic the sensations were, if I realized this wasn't reality, sacrificing my life wouldn't be a big deal, right?

But then it couldn't be called the Trial of Courage.

In other words, I didn't allow Evan to touch me to overcome the Trial...

'Did I, did I willingly allow Evan to touch me...?'

It felt like a dream, but it was so vivid.

Even now, I couldn't forget Evan's large, firm, and broad body.

It was driving me crazy.

Even while riding in the carriage, I kept looking at Evan.

Since I was only subtly scanning the surroundings with my weak Holy Power, there was no way Evan would notice.

'Something... seems different...?'

Evan had changed after undergoing the Trial.

Before, he was still a Hero with a youthful feel, but now he looked like a veteran Hero who had already experienced everything.

It was strange to think that he had changed just by completing the Trial of Courage.

'He's become even more handsome, damn it.'

Had I already fallen head over heels?

I couldn't even see Evan's face properly, but just because his atmosphere had changed, I thought he had become more handsome. I even wondered if I was going crazy.

Besides, it seemed like I wasn't getting anything out of completing the Trial, so it would be stranger if I wasn't annoyed.

'I'm going crazy...'

I wanted to slap my forehead and sigh right away, but if I did that while facing each other, Evan would obviously worry.

I must never... let him find out that I had a Trial where I tried to have a child with Evan or anything like that.

Never...!!

.

.

.

As soon as the carriage arrived at the Archduke's mansion, Valencia and Lucia greeted us.

"Thank you so much."

As Evan bowed his head and said that, Valencia let out a hollow laugh.

"You broke the wall."

"Yes."

"...Equal to me, no... A wielder of the Holy Sword broke the wall... You seem to have become stronger than me already."

The gaze that looked down on Evan was long gone.

"The word 'talent'... wouldn't be appropriate. Talent is a word used to refer to those lower than oneself."

"..."

Valencia silently extended his hand.

"I look forward to working with you. Hero."

"I look forward to working with you, Archduke."

The two monsters shook hands and exchanged greetings.

"What will you do now?"

"I plan to go and catch the root cause of everything."

At that, Valencia's eyes widened.

"The Demon King... you mean?"

He didn't expect the story of the Demon King to come up so suddenly.

Of course, the Demon King had to be defeated, but there was a major problem with that.

"The path to the Demon realm is not yet known."

"No, I have already found out how to get to the Demon realm. It has to be now."

What did that mean?

Valencia was dumbfounded, but at the same time, he continued to speak in order to stop Evan, who had already made up his mind.

"Are you really sure? The Demon King is a dangerous being."

"It's okay. If it's not now... this world will perish."

The story Evan told with a wistful look was shocking to everyone.

"Wh-what...? Wait a minute. Isn't there still time left? More than that, how did you..."

"I'm sorry. It's too complicated and long of a story to explain... I don't think I can tell it here right now."

There were too many things to explain.

And it wasn't a story that could be told in this place.

"...I'll go too."

"It's okay, Archduke."

"No, if you're going to defeat the Demon King, shouldn't I, a Sword Master, also step up?"

"It's really okay. I'm not saying this without knowing my place."

Above all, Valencia had something he had to protect.

"You have to protect Lucia."

"..."

Valencia looked at Evan with complicated eyes.

After a while, Valencia sighed and continued to speak.

"I understand. But can you at least let me hear the story? What happened... and how you broke the wall in such a short time. You have that much time, right?"

"Of course."

Evan nodded.

After all, there was one more person he had to explain to in another place.

"I won't make the same mistake this time."

He tried to solve it alone and perished.

Now, he could no longer stand by and watch the Hero, no... the Saintess, sacrifice and solve everything alone.

"There's no time to delay. Let's leave right away."

Originally, the idea of attacking the Demon realm first was impossible.

Unlike the demons, who were beings from the Demon realm that crossed over to this place, we couldn't know their location.

But... wasn't there one person who was caught by the hair while crossing over from the Demon realm to this place?

There was a hint there.

"Let's go."

How to get to the Demon realm.

Evan knew it very well.

It was such a clear answer that he wondered why he hadn't thought of this method.

"To Argent Academy."

Maleficent.

Argent, who defeated that person, would know.

About the path to the Demon realm.

1 - Promise

So, Valencia, and…

“You just had to follow, didn’t you…”

Valencia muttered with a sigh.

“I want to go with Aria, Sister…”

“I’m sorry, Saintess…”

“[It’s alright. I like being with Lucia too.]”

Lucia looked up at me, her eyes shining brightly at my words.

Lucia is cute.

I felt so frustrated that I couldn’t see, at least I could roughly distinguish voices through Thought-form…

The fact that I could only see Lucia’s cute appearance in 3D modeling, and even that unrendered, was just despairing to me.

But is this really okay?

“Won’t the Archduke’s estate be empty? Are you sure it’s alright, Teacher?”

“…Before, I was too busy stopping Magic beasts, but now the North is peaceful. It’s fine for the Archduke’s estate in the peaceful North to be without its master for a few days.”

“I guess… that’s true.”

Uriel nodded.

The usual high-tension Uriel was nowhere to be found.

Were the things she faced in the Trial that shocking?

At least Uriel seemed to have regained some composure, but Stella still couldn't seem to shake off the shock…

'Seriously, what did you guys experience…?'

If it messed them up to this extent, it must have been something so big that even squeezing out all their mental strength and courage wouldn't have been enough.

'I wish something like that had happened to me instead…'

I was the only one who had gone through something I couldn't even talk about.

It really was an incredible Trial.

…

In a different sense.

Anyway…

"It's not far to the magic circle, so please wait a little longer, Saintess."

"[Thank you, Valencia. Teleportation fees must be quite expensive…]"

Unlike other places, the Archduke's estate, which had been responsible for the safety of the North, didn't have much money, so using the teleportation magic circle wasn't easy for Valencia either.

Especially if the Archduke's estate was paying for everything.

"It's alright. More than anything… my disciple, who has surpassed me, is telling me that I must do this, so I can't not believe it…"

Valencia, who had declared that I was equal to or better than her…

I reflexively turned to Evan, but he didn't seem to care.

'Whoa…'

He's really changed a lot…

When we first got on the carriage and were moving to the Archduke's estate, he was so focused on the fact that I had undergone such a Trial that he didn't pay attention, but looking at him now, it's unbelievable.

'Something… seems very different…'

As we rode in the carriage towards the magic circle to return to Argent Academy, the changes were clearly visible.

If he had changed this much after entering the Trial of Courage, there was essentially only one explanation.

'Did he really succeed in awakening?'

If his personality had changed after entering the Trial, it meant that something significant had happened inside.

For Evan, there was essentially only one possibility.

Moreover…

'The magic power I feel is different…'

I could clearly feel Evan's inherent essence, but it was completely different from the immature Evan I had known.

Considering his personality from earlier, and the way he seemed so experienced, it felt like he had been through this many times before…

Yes, he felt like a veteran who had been through thick and thin.

I don't know what happened in the Trial of Courage, but…

‘The power I feel from the necklace has weakened.’

It’s a ridiculous idea, but could the Thought-form of the previous Hero have flowed into Evan?

If so, a point of contention arises as to whether we can still view “Evan” as “Evan”…

‘But considering his affection for me and the occasional actions he shows, it seems like it’s still Evan…’

He took care of me first earlier, didn’t he?

Even though he seemed incredibly rushed because we needed to return to Argent Academy as soon as possible, he didn’t forget to take care of me.

‘What happened…’

If it was a Trial that could change him so much, and even lead to awakening, it must have been an incredible Trial.

In addition to that, Stella and Uriel were also in unusual states, probably because they had successfully passed the Trial.

It might be good to expect the two of them to advance in their cultivation soon.

Especially Stella…

‘Is she really going to evolve into a Great Mage…?’

Was the Trial that big of a deal?

Well, it’s not easy to accept a Trial as a Trial.

Even I, for example, thought it would be okay to mingle with Evan, thinking, “It’s just a Trial anyway~”.

I was aware that it was a Trial, but I couldn't act with the thought that it didn't matter because it was just an illusion.

Therefore, the fact that I thought it was okay to do that… thing with Evan meant that I had essentially accepted Evan.

'Sigh…'

It always comes back to this thought.

Why did I really do that?

It's still absurd no matter how much I think about it.

"Ugh…"

I turned my head towards the window, pretending to look outside, and tried to clear my thoughts.

Of course, everyone knew that I was blind, so they were puzzled when I suddenly turned my head towards the window.

…

Just ignore it…

Sigh…

"Are you… serious…?"

As soon as Evan entered the Headmaster's office after returning to Argent Academy, Argent asked him if he was out of his mind.

He didn't seem to be trying to insult Evan.

Rather, it was closer to genuinely wondering if he was serious, so he had an incredulous expression.

Of course, Evan wasn't the type to lie about something like this.

Argent knew that fact well, so he was making an absurd expression.

"If that's true, then it's a really big problem…"

Evan nodded at those words.

It was only after hearing the full explanation that I understood why Evan was moving so urgently.

Me too.

'I'm going to die…?'

To be precise, the Demon King would launch a surprise attack and grow too quickly, to a level we couldn't handle, and devour the continent.

I made an "ah" expression.

'The Demon King's surprise attack… I didn't think about it…!'

I simply didn't pay attention because the probability was too low.

There was one thing I, who claimed to be a stagnant water, no, Wonhyo's skull water, had forgotten.

'The more quickly you deal with the executives before the scheduled time, the higher the probability…!'

The future had already changed beyond recognition.

I had thought that the story was no longer flowing as I knew it, so I considered it unnecessary and only used it for reference, but I had forgotten one important point.

The possibility of the Demon King launching a surprise attack was too high in the future of this world that I had built.

I had caught too many executives too early.

Even the Succubus Queen was originally supposed to be caught in the second half of the third year, so I had committed an even more foolish act.

‘So, me sacrificing myself at that time to prevent the destruction must have been that…’

I had ruined the future I could have prevented because of my stupid thoughts, so I probably just sacrificed myself since I wouldn’t feel any pain anyway.

I might have had hope that I could return if I died.

Even now, I wouldn’t be unable to sacrifice myself if I had to.

There’s no one else who can stop it besides me anyway, so if that’s the case, then…

‘I do hope that at least Evan survives…’

Not just Evan.

Isn’t it okay to hope that the people who have become so precious to me will survive?

I smiled inwardly.

‘Evan…’

How much do you even like me?

He even regressed once, or rather, it’s a bit different from regressing… Anyway, researching and understanding the characteristics of the necklace and using it was an achievement made by Evan’s persistence.

A way to save the world without anyone dying.

It was something that even I couldn’t have come up with.

‘He’s really… an amazing guy.’

I suddenly had that thought.

If he’s such a dedicated person who would do anything for me, and so kind that he wants to save the world…

He’s full of plot armor… and he’s a Hero who’s stronger than that Archduke.

He’s a Hero, strong, will have a lot of money for the rest of his life, kind, and dedicated to me.

In modern times, people would call him a top marriage prospect…

He literally has no flaws.

‘Ugh…’

No, what am I thinking…

‘I said I’d give you an answer after catching the Demon King…’

I shook my head.

Of course, I had already accepted Evan once, but even so, accepting his confession in this situation would be crazy.

I had also asked him to give me an answer to his confession after defeating the Demon King.

So…

‘Not yet…’

Not yet.

Not… yet.

2 - Promise

That there was no future for me other than sacrificing myself to die.

However, I also had a lot to say.

The probability was extremely low to begin with, and even if that probability was satisfied, what could I possibly do to find a guy who could spawn anytime, anywhere?

How could I find him when the continent is so vast?

It's ridiculous.

In the game, when that happened, it was simply a disaster.

Of course, if you followed the story normally until the third semester of the third year, it wouldn't happen at all, so many people didn't even know it existed.

I knew it because I had spent tens of thousands of hours doing all sorts of crazy things.

And in all that time playing the game, the Demon King appeared and ruined the game only once, and that was when I used cheats to quickly catch all the executives.

That ending was definitely impactful, but since there was nothing I could do, I didn't pay any attention to it, and therefore didn't prepare for it at all.

But now that my life, no, this world has become reality, how can I not be surprised that the low probability that I thought might exist has actually happened?

If it weren't for the cheat-like story of Future Evan indirectly returning to the past through the necklace to give me a solution and power, it would

have been impossible to clear at all.

'This is absurd.'

Is it the aftermath of the game world becoming reality, or is it because I was so careless about the 0.0001 probability that this happened?

Either way, my head hurts like hell.

"I don't really believe it... but if that monster does what you say, it's true that no one will be able to stop it."

Argent said with a tired expression.

As she said, the Demon King was a monster that ate and multiplied everything around it.

And it is impossible to fight the Demon King, who has already eaten another continent and grown to the size of a continent.

In other words, the only way is to go directly to the Demon realm, which has been devastated and has nothing to eat, and subjugate the Demon King.

"Haa..."

Argent sighed deeply and looked at Evan.

"Okay, I'll prepare the way to the Demon realm. The magic circle I used in the past should still be there. Of course, it will take a few days to activate it."

"A few days... you say?"

"It will be the final battle to determine the fate of mankind. Prepare yourself. Only we will go."

Argent said and turned around.

"Um... Headmaster...?"

Uriel called Argent in a hesitant voice.

Perhaps because she was like an infinitely high ancestor, Uriel seemed to have a hard time dealing with Argent.

"What?"

"Wouldn't it be better if we all went together...? Even if the Demon King is weakened, we can't do it with just us... I thought it would be better to go with as much preparation as possible."

"Yes... that would be the case with a normal opponent."

Argent nodded.

But,

"The Demon King is different."

The Demon King is different.

That monster is a monster that gets stronger the more it eats.

It would be a disaster if we took all the forces to catch the Demon King and they were eaten by the Demon King.

"And it's not very helpful."

Unlike the soldiers who would be like throwing eggs at a rock, Sword Masters like the Duke of the North or priests who believe in God would be able to inflict a little damage, but that would be like turning an egg into a bare fist.

Will a normal human break a rock by hitting it a hundred times?

They will only break their fists and cry.

It's not just that they're not helpful, but the moment they're eaten, they become fuel and power for the Demon King, so it's much better not to take

them.

"..."

Uriel looked dejected.

"... Did something happen?"

"I just... received the Trial of Courage..."

After receiving the Trial, she didn't know herself very well.

Uriel lowered her head, feeling only confused.

"Um... is it okay for me to really be here...? With my level..."

"I'm seeing the day when a princess who has been given all kinds of talents is saying this."

I've lived for hundreds of years, Argent muttered and chuckled.

"You're strong, Uriel. Very."

"... Yes?"

"It's strange that my disciple, who has already completed the final awakening and is about to become a Hero who can beat Valencia, and my disciple who is about to become a Archmage, is saying that."

Argent looked back at Stella with a dumbfounded expression.

"..."

Stella had a look of being deeply immersed in something.

"She's been like that since we came here, right?"

"[... Yes, that's right.]"

"It's a sign of enlightenment. She'll become a Archmage in a few days. She must have gained something from the Trial."

Argent looked at her disciple with an envious expression.

"I never thought my disciple would become a Archmage faster than me."

Argent smiled happily, saying that the hard work she had put into making her solve problems had paid off.

"Aria."

"[... Yes?]"

"When I look at your party... I sometimes think."

Argent said with a wistful expression.

"If our party had received that Trial you mentioned... maybe we could have subjugated the Demon King... that's what I think."

"[...]"

"The stupid elf who could have received at least the Trial of Courage went back to the Elf Kingdom to get his weapon."

Argent turned around, lamenting that he might have become stronger if he had received the Trial.

"Don't worry about the number of people. Now that it's come to this, I'll mobilize all my connections."

"Connections...?"

"[Connections... you say?]"

Evan and I asked at the same time.

Argent tilted her head back and smiled.

"The former Hero party and the current Hero party will subjugate the Demon King together. Isn't it exciting?"

"...!"

Evan's eyes widened.

"Even so, it's just that elf and me. Should I take Valencia for the swordsman...?"

"Ahem..."

Valencia coughed at those words.

Evan had said directly in the north that he wouldn't take her because Lucia was there, but now she was going with him, so it was only natural that she would react like that.

Of course, Argent didn't know that at all.

"... It's been a long time since that guy could have been alive."

"That guy is..."

"The previous Hero. That idiot who disappeared after the Saintess sacrificed herself and died."

"I, idiot..."

"It's a relief. If you didn't have that necklace or whatever, you would have followed the same path as that guy."

Evan nodded at those words.

"We have to hope that doesn't happen this time."

Argent said with a somewhat bitter expression, leaving only the words that she really had to go prepare now, and then moved her feet.

"Oh, right."

Lastly.

"Since it's the final battle, why don't you two do something?"

"...?"

"[?]"

"Why don't you confirm your love for each other? What..."

Argent raised her finger with a lewd smile.

"... Something like this?"

Oh.

That crazy woman.

I almost got angry at Argent's gesture that openly evoked that act, but,

"... Please refrain from such jokes."

"What, I heard you received the memories, but the fun of joking is gone. What a shame."

Anyway,

"If something happens in this final battle, you're really screwed, so do something before you regret it. Don't be like me."

"... Yes. I'll keep that in mind."

"Okay, I'm going."

She really disappeared now.

I looked back at Evan, looking at the place where Argent, who had completely disappeared, had been.

Evan was also looking back at me.

"Um..."

"[I don't know what to talk about...Honestly, it's a bit overwhelming.

"[P, please give me your answer after we subjugate the Demon King...]"

"That's... that's what happened."

Evan nodded.

No, I really can't get used to him.

He looks like Evan, but he's really become a guy who's been through all sorts of hardships.

His personality has also become somewhat taciturn... Considering the way he looked during the Trial, I think this personality is probably because of his determination to subjugate the Demon King.

'What am I supposed to do about this?'

I don't know what she wants me to confirm.

'I didn't tell Evan... about it...'

But that couldn't be helped.

How can I tell him that I was about to have sex with him in the Trial?!

I can't believe that I received such a Trial at that important moment!

Perhaps because of that, I had a hesitant expression.

'Ugh...'

I have a strange feeling that my lower abdomen is ringing.

Is the curse activating at a time like this?

'It's a curse... Haa...'

It's tormenting me like this at a moment I didn't want.

It's so annoying.

3 - Promise

I also agree that we should do something so that we don't have any regrets.

No matter how much of a hardcore player I am, having played this game for tens of thousands of hours, the place I'm in now is reality, and things are flowing differently from the future I knew.

Especially from the moment we head towards the final battle with the Demon King, I won't be able to trust the information I know at all.

No one knows how that monster will fight.

I pride myself on knowing, but it might change again when we go to face him.

He's not stupid enough to charge recklessly when there's nothing to devour.

'I need to think about what to do next… how to deal with the Demon King…'

But right now, instead of thinking about that…

"Ahem…"

"…"

How did it end up like this?

At first, I thought we would talk about the Demon King and discuss what to do, but now that we're sitting together, we can't even bring it up.

Maybe it's because of what Argent said to us just a moment ago, but both Evan and I can't seem to say anything properly.

"[…How was the Trial?]"

In the end, I was the one who spoke first.

Since one of the biggest factors in Evan's change must have been the Trial, I thought it would be good to talk about it.

However, as soon as I brought up the Trial, Evan's face, which had been looking helpless until just now, froze.

"[Ah… um…]"

Did I bring up the wrong thing?

If I had known it would turn out like this, I wouldn't have brought it up.

'This is troublesome…'

I groaned inwardly.

Then what kind of story should I bring up?

'This is all Argent's fault…'

If he hadn't said those things, we wouldn't have ended up in this awkward situation, just the two of us talking.

Why did he bring up such a thing and create this frustrating situation?

'Of course… I thought I had to answer someday…'

I've been dragging it on for too long.

Even though the Demon King's subjugation is just around the corner, Evan has been risking his life to defeat the executives all this time.

In the beginning, he received a lot of help from me, but he almost single-handedly caught the Succubus Queen.

It's true that my contribution was directly pinpointing the Succubus Queen's location, capturing her, and weakening her, but that was it.

In the end, I ended up having my body stolen, causing trouble for Evan and the others…

'I didn't expect her to use my body like that…'

I still don't know how she knew that Evan liked me and committed such an act.

Well, if she's the Succubus Queen, it would be strange if she wasn't perceptive in that area.

I sighed deeply.

'Do I really… like Evan?'

To be honest, I'm still confused.

At first, I didn't dislike Evan.

No, if I thought of him as a character, he was one of my favorite characters, the protagonist.

But now it's not a game, it's reality.

And it's been almost four years since this world became reality.

If I only look at the length of my life, my previous life was much longer, but if I think about the quality of life and what I've done for this world in the past four years…

'I think I've already decided that this is the place where I'll live…'

I feel happy living here.

Maybe when I subjugate the Demon King, I had already made up my mind, so I made the choice to sacrifice myself.

Or maybe it was to save Evan.

Usually, even if something dangerous happens to me, I can throw myself in without hesitation because I don't die and pain is pleasure for me.

But against the Demon King, it wasn't easy, even for me, who has the power of God.

Trying to sacrifice myself to subjugate the Demon King is literally throwing away my life.

Even if it feels like a pleasant act… what's scary about death is not the pain you get from it, but the fact that my existence disappears.

'Am I… to that extent…'

Am I loving Evan,

The man in front of me?

I approached Evan.

"…"

Evan looked down at me silently.

Evan, who had received the Trial and memories from his future self, had changed a lot.

In fact, he himself hasn't changed much, but at least until he subjugates the Demon King, he wants to be serious like this, I read it through Thought-form.

Even so, seeing Evan looking so dignified made me feel strange.

The experience gained through the Trial was definitely not in vain.

His devotion to me, who had transcended time, was able to find an ending that saved a future that was about to be ruined.

There was a reason why he was chosen as the Hero.

He really was… an amazing guy.

"[Do you know, Evan.]"

"...Know what?"

"[What I was thinking when I first met Evan, I mean.]"

"...I don't really know…"

Evan answered apologetically.

No, it would be weirder if you knew that.

Considering the concept I've shown so far, the answer I'm about to give will be beyond your imagination.

"[I thought I was in big trouble.]"

"Uh… uh?"

"[Because you were more fragile than the Hero I had imagined. If you think about Evan's reaction when I was stabbed in the chest by a demon on the day of the entrance ceremony…]"

"...Aria…?"

"[Yes?]"

"Even I would be shocked if I saw myself back then…"

"[…Oh, is that so?]"

Gasp.

Considering the way I usually act, I thought I had become used to seeing my body being treated so roughly.

But I guess that's not the case.

"Of course… I think it's understandable. I was scared… Seeing you hurt because of me, I couldn't think of anything."

Evan smiled and replied.

"[Hehe… It's okay. I was just kidding.]"

"Maybe I've been looking at you a little differently until now."

"[Looking at me differently?]"

"The memories I received from my future self had a bit of playfulness in them. Seeing that side of you now, I think I understand a little."

Oh.

Was my behavior a little different…?

I don't really know…

"It's better to see you joking around like that than just acting like a Saintess."

"[…Eep.]"

That's unfair.

If you say it like that, I can't help but lose my composure.

"...I know. How heavy the burden you're carrying as a Saintess is. How hard you're trying not to show a disheveled appearance."

Oh…

That's actually all a concept…

I might have to keep the reason why I originally tried to act that way a secret for the rest of my life.

But well…

'This is just a misunderstanding, but…'

Every word he says is for me, so it's not so bad.

I was smiling slightly as I thought that.

"But… I want you to promise me just one thing."

"[…A promise?]"

"Yeah."

Evan said that and raised his hand, holding out his pinky finger.

"[Evan… ?]"

"In the future… before and after subjugating the Demon King…"

Evan continued with a sad expression.

"I hope you'll cherish yourself."

"[…]"

"This world is important. Saving people's lives is also important… Subjugating the Demon King to protect the peace of the world is also important."

Evan's hand was trembling.

"But… you don't have to carry all of that, Aria."

"[Evan…]"

"I… I want you to be happy."

With his pinky finger outstretched, Evan lowered his head slightly.

Perhaps overwhelmed by emotion, tears were flowing from Evan's eyes.

'Ah…'

What was I thinking?

The person who loves me the most, and who has been watching me sacrifice myself all along, is right in front of me.

'Ah…'

I'm a crazy bitch.

A hardcore masochist who feels pleasure from pain, and a bitch who's so obsessed with the concept of being seen as a noble Saintess by the people around her that she's been devoured by it.

I'm a bitch who's been using the hearts of the people who like me to get pleasure from being seen as a sacrificing Saintess by the people around me.

I couldn't bring myself to tell Evan the truth.

But…

'Someday…'

Someday I wanted to let him know.

So that I can let him know… I wanted to be with him forever.

Is it really okay for me to do that?

Is it really okay?

'Let's prove it.'

Not to gain personal pleasure this time.

Let's go out to save the man I truly want to save.

I will definitely subjugate the Demon King.

Even if I have to mobilize everything I know.

And…

"[Evan… wait a moment.]"

There was an answer I wanted to give to this foolish man who had been waiting for me all this time.

"...Huh?"

With both hands, I carefully held the pinky finger that Evan had extended to me.

While gently pulling the grasped hand downwards, I stood on tiptoe.

"…"

"…"

The conversation didn't continue any further.

But we were definitely connected.

We stood there like that for a long time.

Promise (Interlude)

"The preparations are complete."

Argent said with a serious expression.

The dimensional transfer magic circle, which seemed like it would take a long time, was truly ready.

And that wasn't all.

"... I can't believe this is real..."

Mirnel, who had left on a journey to become stronger while retrieving her weapon, had finally returned.

"To be honest, I didn't believe you when you first told me."

"Seriously... if I was willing to teleport you here myself, you should have believed me."

Argent said with a dumbfounded expression.

She usually respected Mirnel's opinions, but this was different.

In this urgent situation where the Demon King could attack at any moment, she couldn't cater to Mirnel's preferences.

Even so, being dragged back by the hair after enjoying her travels wasn't a pleasant feeling, so Mirnel shrugged and turned her head.

"Anyway..."

The remaining members of the Savior Hero party were two. There was a minor hiccup with Valencia replacing the vanguard, but a Sword Master was still a valuable asset.

"I can't believe I'm here..."

Valencia said with a bewildered expression.

It was hard to believe that the Savior Hero party members, and the current Hero party, were all gathered in one party.

This might be the first time.

Such an absurd situation where the previous and current parties formed a party together.

"Well, you all know the situation, right? The preparations are mostly done, so all that's left is to go through this magic circle and take down the Demon King. It's directly connected to where the Demon King is."

"... Where did you even get this magic circle?"

"Obviously, it was created a long time ago to subjugate the Demon King. It should still be in the same place."

The Demon King wasn't a moving creature, but a monster with no fixed form.

It was unlikely that such a monster would have moved its location.

Stella said it would probably be in the same place.

It made sense.

In the game, the Demon King never changed its location.

'If we could just find a way to get there, we could have gone to defeat the Demon King from the start...'

Of course, dying there would lead to a bad ending.

There were no save-load options in the Demon King battle.

You could save before entering and load if you were about to die, but if you accidentally died, you'd go straight to the bad ending.

Anyway... the fact that all that was left was to defeat the Demon King felt surreal.

'How much effort did I put in to get here...'

At first, I was simply maintaining my persona and moving for my own pleasure, while also saving the world as a side effect.

But now, the two had switched.

Saving the world had become my main goal, rather than maintaining my persona.

Of course, the highest goal of all was...

"..."

I silently turned to Evan.

As I turned to Evan, he smiled and waved, knowing that he couldn't see anyway, and that he could see even without turning.

It was natural to look at each other when talking, so I was doing it out of habit.

But when I turned to him and he looked back at me and answered as if it were nothing, I felt strange.

"Is it really over once we defeat the Demon King..."

I nodded at Evan's murmur.

There was nothing left.

Once we defeated the Demon King, everything would be over.

"[But didn't you say it would take several days?]"

Suddenly curious, I asked, and Argent flicked her fingers and pointed to one side as if asking the obvious.

There, Stella, who had somehow recovered, was waving at me.

"My disciple helped me this time too."

"At this point, we can call her a Archmage... don't you think so, Master?"

"... I'm not quite an Archmage yet?"

Argent scolded, saying that she couldn't become an Archmage so easily, but Stella argued that she knew more about space than Argent did.

"W, well..."

Argent seemed speechless at that, unable to say anything and looking at her disciple with a frustrated expression.

I've never seen Argent like that before.

"Seeing the master and disciple fighting, I don't know why it feels like their roles have reversed."

Mirnel said with an absurd expression, but Argent was too busy fighting with Stella to care.

...

Are they really fighting...?

That would be a bit shocking...

Huh... is that really Argen Isis, who dominated an era and is still known as one of the greatest mages?

If you took away this scene and asked if she was the headmaster, most people wouldn't believe you.

Even I find it hard to believe, so how much more would someone who doesn't know anything?

"Ah, whatever. Anyway, seeing that everyone's here, I guess you've all finished your preparations?"

Everyone nodded at Argent's question.

And...

Argent turned her head and looked at me and Evan.

"Looking at you two, it seems you've made up your minds."

"...!!"

"..."

Evan's eyes widened at Argent's sharp words.

My face flushed and I turned my head.

I didn't expect her to notice so quickly.

"But it doesn't seem like you've done anything special. I thought you would have done something, but you're more wholesome than I thought."

"[... I, I don't know what you're talking about...]"

"Come on, you're not kids, you know everything."

Argent said casually.

"This, this."

Argent even used her fingers in an obscene way, shocking everyone who was watching from behind.

Stella facepalmed, and Uriel seemed shocked that her ancestor was doing such a thing so casually.

And Evan said with a dumbfounded expression.

"... Is that something a headmaster should do...?"

"Oh my, you've become quite bold? And manly too. If it were you in the past, you would have turned red like that Saintess over there and shouted about what we were doing."

"..."

Evan looked speechless.

It wasn't just because he had nothing to say, but also because what she said was true.

"Did you perhaps experience it through your memories?"

"... Please stop..."

Evan, defeated, finally surrendered.

"Master... please stop..."

Not only that, but Stella and Uriel joined in to scold Argent, and only then did she realize that she had gone too far, and said with a smile.

"Sorry. I guess I'm just interested in young people's love stories."

Argent waved her hand and said that, then smiled and asked.

"But how about it? After hearing my story, do you feel a little less nervous?"

"... I definitely feel less nervous. It's effective."

"Right? I'm not usually like this. I did this on purpose to ease your tension."

I wonder if that's true.

Only she would know how much sincerity was in those words.

Anyway...

"Well then, shall we get going?"

Everyone nodded at Argent's words.

All preparations were complete.

The Saintess with Holy Power fully charged in the Relic.

The Hero who achieved his final awakening.

A space mage who was no different from a Archmage.

A knight who gained enlightenment and became stronger through the Trial.

A divine archer.

The greatest power in the North.

A great mage of incantation.

Everyone gathered, and the new Hero party was formed at this moment, in this place.

"The lineup is insane."

I nodded at Stella's words.

I felt like it would be harder to lose with this team.

"We will definitely subjugate them."

Evan said with shining eyes.

At the moment everyone was determined, they had to approach it with the thought that there would be no other chance.

In fact, if they failed to subjugate the Demon King this time, there would be virtually no other chance.

And...

"[Please don't forget our promise, Evan.]"

"... Of course."

At my words, Evan's expression, which had been full of determination, instantly softened and he answered with a small smile.

That was enough.

I smiled back and nodded slightly.

"Let's go."

With Argent's words as the last, the magic circle was activated.

"To the Demon realm."

The Demon King subjugation, which had been restarted after hundreds of years.

An unprecedented alliance of previous and current Hero parties.

Departure.

1 - The Final Battle

‘He’s not even telling the people of the Holy Kingdom before leaving.’

Thinking about it now, this might be better.

Instead of announcing that I'm going to subjugate the Demon King and then leaving, it's much more comfortable to just go, subjugate him, and come back.

The people of the Holy Kingdom, especially the Holy Knight Order, would definitely follow me wherever I go, so it's better not to tell them.

‘It's a cold story, but they wouldn't be of much help anyway…’

If it were a numbers game with low to mid-level demons, having the Holy Knight Order would be helpful, but the Demon King battle wasn't a numbers game.

It was a fight against a giant monster with overwhelming power…

No matter how many Holy Knights there were, it would be fortunate if they weren't swallowed whole by the Demon King's overwhelming power.

‘I didn’t even tell Danas.’

Honestly, I think that person should retire soon.

He must be married and have children by now, so being a Holy Knight is too risky.

… But it's infuriating that he didn't tell me anything about such a congratulatory event.

Maybe he thought he couldn't possibly say such a thing, he wouldn't dare… something like that.

“This is… the Demon realm…”

When the magic circle activated and I opened my eyes, I was standing in front of a crumbling, ruined castle filled with Demonic energy.

“It’s still the same here.”

A ruined castle.

No one knows why the Demon King is in a ruined castle.

Even in the game, the reason wasn't revealed.

If the game didn't tell us, there's no way I would know.

Of course, there were people who speculated based on the stories revealed so far, but it was just speculation, and no one would know if it was true unless the developers said so.

And I'm in a position where I was dragged here before seeing the answer.

It wasn't a good idea to make wild guesses and fantasize here.

What I need to do right now is subjugate the Demon King.

To subjugate him safely without anyone getting hurt, without me sacrificing myself, or without other people dying.

‘That’s the hardest thing to do.’

But it's different now.

The current Hero party, as well as the power of the previous Hero party, are gathered, a situation where only the strongest of the current era are gathered?

With this much, it might be a little difficult, but we should be able to subjugate him safely.

‘Hoo…’

Once I go inside, there's no turning back.

I swallowed hard and tried to look inside, but I couldn't see anything because of the powerful Demonic energy flowing throughout the castle.

‘At this rate, won’t I go blind as soon as I go in…?’

If it were just receiving light and looking around, there would be no problem, but I use Holy Power like a wave to understand the surroundings, so if it's blocked by Demonic energy, there's no answer.

Of course, it's not the Demon King's direct body, but only the Demonic energy flowing from it that's flowing through the castle, so I can see the surroundings now if I use a little more Holy Power, but…

‘It’s good to prepare in advance…’

It might get worse if I go inside.

This castle is constantly exposed to the Demon King's Demonic energy, so Demonic energy is flowing around, but if I purify it, it won't interfere with seeing the surroundings.

I first approached the castle and spread the Holy Power of Purification.

The advantage of purifying a building is that it Teleports on its own without pouring in Holy Power.

As the Holy Power flowed along the walls and swept away the remaining Demonic energy, the surroundings began to be seen properly.

It felt like it had become a sanctuary.

I didn't think it would go this far when I used it, so I made a surprised expression.

‘What is it?’

This is completely unexpected.

But…

‘…Did I get stronger?’

It wasn't all that bad.

My Holy Power has definitely gotten stronger.

Well, I passed the Trial, so it would be weirder if I didn't get stronger…

‘Even so, I didn’t expect it to be this smooth.’

Not only has the quality of Holy Power improved much more than before, but the quantity has also increased.

It's also easier to operate.

Then I couldn't stop here even more.

It was better than fighting in a place full of Demonic energy.

‘I was going to purify the surface simply and look around to see what was there… but I changed my mind.’

I smiled inwardly and moved my steps into the ruined castle along the revealed path.

“It’s a spooky place… I don’t think I would have dared to come in if it weren’t for Aria’s Holy Power.”

Stella, who was next to Uriel, nodded at what he said.

Even I, who can't see, don't want to come in, so how much more would other people feel?

The ominous energy that I feel is already unusual, but who would want to go in if it looks dark and gloomy on the outside and dark energy flies

around?

“[Be careful. The Demon King might appear from anywhere.]”

He might be surrounding the ruined castle to ambush us, knowing that we would come.

That guy has lived for a long time in his own way, so even though he's an amorphous monster, he's not without that much intelligence.

So it was natural that I couldn't figure out how he would act.

‘I can’t pinpoint his location…’

This entire ruined castle is already in the Demon King's grasp, and it's impossible to pinpoint the location of his main body among them.

Then, the only thing I can do is to wander around this vast ruined castle and look for a place where he might be, or wait for him to attack first.

‘It’s too late to run away now.’

We definitely ambushed him.

He probably noticed as soon as we came here, but there was no way to escape.

Then he really exists somewhere in this ruined castle…

“There’s no time. We have to find him quickly.”

Evan said that and raised the Holy Sword.

- W, wait a minute, Evan? What are you going to do…?

Estel's voice sounded flustered when he suddenly raised the Holy Sword and said that.

Evan began to gather magic power as if asking what was obvious.

The Holy Sword began to overflow with pure white light.

“I’m going to blow this place away.”

“!!”

No way.

“…Indeed, that’s a good method.”

Valencia nodded in agreement with those words.

‘Yeah, it’s a good method… it is, but…’

This place is wide…?

Is it even possible to blow away a place as wide as an ordinary imperial castle?

That's what I thought, but…

- T, this technique is…!!

“I’ll call out the Demon King.”

An incomparably powerful Holy Power was pouring out of Estel's body.

Come to think of it, after the Trial, we had no way of knowing how strong Evan had become.

Nothing happened, and he didn't directly show his power.

Only that Evan's atmosphere had changed, and that Valencia recognized the increased level at a glance as soon as she saw Evan and said that he had become stronger than her.

Only from that, we could know that Evan had become stronger than we thought.

But we had no way of knowing exactly how strong he had become.

‘Valencia…’

When facing the Magic beast of the cold, Valencia didn't slaughter thousands of Magic beasts with one sword?

Valencia, a Sword Master comparable to a great mage, was able to show that kind of power.

The majesty of simply firing Sword energy, as if cutting the world in half, was so shocking that I was shocked even though I didn't see it with my own eyes.

I also realized that reality and the game are different.

“Aria, please declare a sanctuary!”

Evan's familiar command.

Hearing those words, I reflexively declared a sanctuary around me.

Holy Power poured out from my body and Relic, and pure white light spread around like a wave.

At that moment,

Crack!

Evan slammed the Holy Sword into the ground.

- E, Evan…?!

“[Holy Explosion]”

Evan muttered without hesitation.

At the same time, the powerful Holy Power that poured out from the Holy Sword began to explode and spread around along the ground.

Soon,

KWAHHHH!

Light burst out from the cracked floor along with an earthquake, and the castle began to shake.

As the castle began to collapse, pieces of stone began to fall one by one.

“W, wait a minute!”

“It’s dangerous!”

Everyone shouted at Evan in panic, but I activated the Holy Law that I had prepared in advance from the moment I heard that he would blow everything up.

“[Everyone, come to me!]”

Thanks to spreading the sanctuary, it became much easier to operate Holy Power.

I spread a shield that covered everyone so that they wouldn't be buried under the falling debris.

Less than 10 minutes after coming to the Demon realm's ruined castle where the Demon King is.

We completely destroyed what was once the Demon King's castle.

2 - The Final Battle

“…Cough, cough!”

The aftermath of the Holy Power explosion subsided, and everyone who had barely survived thanks to the deployed barrier looked around with dazed expressions.

The floor was cracked everywhere, and the outside was visible due to the devastating collapse caused by the earlier earthquake.

The person responsible for this situation nonchalantly pulled out the Holy Sword stuck in the ground.

“Hieeek… Evan has become a monster…”

Estel muttered in a daze.

Even after hearing all the explanations about how Evan had become so strong, she still couldn't understand the situation.

To be honest, I didn't understand it either.

'What is this…'

Why is he so strong?

Until recently, he could barely blow away this castle alone, but now he had blown away not only the castle but also the surrounding land and even the insignificant things beyond the castle.

In effect, he had completely destroyed the abandoned castle area where the Demon King was likely to be.

Despite this, he nonchalantly pulled out the Holy Sword, and the Demonic energy that escaped as a result didn't seem to be that significant.

'What kind of experiences did Future Evan go through…?'

Unlike Holy Power, which grows with faith in God, Demonic energy can only increase the vessel through one's own enlightenment.

And once you become a Sword Master, you can gather and use Demonic energy from the surroundings in addition to the Demonic energy in your body.

'Ah…!'

Only then did I understand why Evan was so strong.

One of the functions of the Holy Sword, Estel, is to convert Demonic energy into Holy Power.

In other words, apart from his inherent Demonic energy, he could put any surrounding Demonic energy or Magi into the Holy Sword and convert it into Holy Power.

In other words, the reason the castle was in such a mess was not only because Evan himself had become stronger but also because he had gathered all the surrounding Demonic energy and Magi.

'It's easy to say, but Valencia probably can't handle it freely either…'

Of course, that's because Valencia is still a newbie who hasn't been a Sword Master for long, but even considering that, it's an absurd amount of power.

'Really…'

Is it possible to defeat the Demon King without anyone getting hurt?

The situation was so optimistic that I even had the absurd thought that the Demon King might have died from the previous attack.

However,

"…"

Evan's expression still didn't ease.

Not only that, but Argent and Mirnel also had grim expressions.

“…I see, I wasn't the only one who felt something was off.”

“What are you really? It feels like you've been here before.”

Evan nodded at those words.

It meant he had been here before.

“…Well, you said you came here in the future. So? Was it different from when you went there then?”

“There are no demons.”

Argent nodded as if he expected it at Evan's answer.

“Demons…?”

“What does that mean, Master?”

The others looked like they didn't understand.

But…

'Ah, wait, could it be.'

Just hearing those words, I could sense what kind of situation we were in.

The fact that demons are not visible is originally absurd.

The Demon realm was originally a world where demons lived.

Why else would demons like Succubus Queen or Maleficent worship the Demon King and try to get rid of us who were interfering?

But now the situation has changed a little, no, a lot.

Originally, low-level demons or Magic beasts without intelligence should have already appeared in this world, trying to kill us who were spreading Demonic energy and Holy Power.

At least mid-level demons or high-level demons should be flying around to assess the situation.

But…

'There's nothing.'

There's nothing at all.

Nothing exists in this Demon realm.

It had become a wasteland, no, worse than that… a dead land where no life was breathing.

“It wasn't like this when I came,”

Argent muttered, sweating profusely.

A desolate land of death where nothing living exists, and a Demon King with the power and instinct to devour everything.

It was a problem that could be concluded with just a little thought.

“[The Demon realm… seems to have been devoured.]”

Devoured by the Demon King.

That was the only way to think about it.

“…!!”

Everyone wore shocked expressions at those words.

“Wait… is that possible? You said he was trying to target us because there was nothing to eat?!”

The Demon King's purpose.

It's just a simple appetite to devour everything alive, but its power and influence are nothing short of a disaster.

That's why our world, full of abundant Demonic energy, organic matter, and living things, would have been a good prey for the Demon King.

But the Demon King had already suffered fatal damage from the battle with the Hero party of salvation, especially from the sacrifice of the Saintess.

It was only natural that he would come to our world to heal that damage, but he would either die or be defeated without devouring anything.

That's why he had been building up his strength.

But…

'That bastard knew it too.'

He knew that after all the executives died, it would be his turn next, so he thought there was really no time.

He could just let it go, but how could he buy time to grow when they would be searching for him with their eyes wide open?

There was only one answer.

Eating his own kind.

Eating everything living in the Demon realm.

Originally, there was nothing to eat in the Demon realm, but there was one thing left.

The demons and Magic beasts who were his people.

Even Magic beasts were like animals that maintained the Demon realm's ecosystem, but now they don't exist.

All living things have been devoured.

Even the demons, who were no different from humans in our world, could not escape the Demon King's grasp as long as they existed in this Demon realm.

Not a single one was left, they were all devoured.

The existence of the Demon King who ruled the Demon realm is no longer anywhere.

No, he can no longer be called the Demon King.

There will be no more people to call the king who devoured all his people to survive a king.

He was just a disaster and a monster.

Kugugugung!

"…!"

"T, the floor…!"

The floor is shaking.

- Kieeeeek!

Everyone stepped back in horror at the sight of the amorphous monsters that began to crawl out of the cracked earth one by one.

Not only that, but also,

"What, what are these?!"

Countless amorphous monsters visible in the distance.

The sight of something black and viscous taking shape and forming a legion as it approached this way was quite terrifying.

The legion of disaster.

Byproducts of disaster, each with fatal Magi.

The Demon King chose a quantity strategy.

'This crazy bastard…'

Believing in his “Authority.”

“What are those…”

Stella muttered in a trembling voice.

But Argent and Mirnel, who knew what those things were, and…

“…”

Evan narrowed his eyes.

The power of each one is weak.

However, the monsters that came out of that disaster inherited the Demon King's powerful Magi and his Authority.

The Authority to devour everything, to eat anything.

Even sharply honed Demonic energy.

“Haaat!”

Mirnel shot an arrow as a test.

The arrow of overwhelming power fired by the divine archer was absorbed as soon as it touched the amorphous monster, without even piercing it.

It's a monster that doesn't respond to ordinary attacks, and each one spreads disaster-like Magi around it.

It was a situation where the name quantity strategy was not wasted.

“It seems like we're in big trouble…”

Argent sweated profusely.

In this situation, the attacks of those who do not use Holy Power, including Argent, Mirnel, and Valencia, were as good as sealed.

Of course, they could use high-level magic or techniques that could not be devoured, but it would be an attack that consumes too much power to fire at each of those mobs, let alone the Demon King himself.

The only ones they could trust were Evan and Aria, who could attack with Holy Power on their swords.

Is this the end… Just as everyone was despairing,

“…Ah!”

Stella's eyes widened as if she had thought of something, and she stepped forward.

Then, she took out a piece of paper with a magic circle drawn on it that she had prepared and closed her eyes to concentrate.

It's not difficult to activate a memorized spell.

“[Severance]”

Stella opened her eyes wide and said, and the air began to distort.

The amorphous monsters that were climbing onto the cracked earth disappeared in an instant.

“T, this is…!”

“It works…!”

They can't handle high-dimensional magic that distorts space.

Argent's eyes widened at that fact.

Then, he smiled and handed Argent the paper that Stella had brought in advance.

“…You know what to do, right?”

“…I never thought the day would come when I would be helped by my own disciple.”

Argent smiled wryly.

“Let's give it a try.”

First, we have to stop those things.

We can't just fall here.

3 - The Final Battle

The battle of attrition continued.

The Demon King, who had concealed himself somewhere, was constantly sending out beings that were no different from his own clones, exhausting us.

The Demon King was also expending his power, but it was only natural that we, who had to deal with each one individually, were more exhausted than he was in creating them.

Argent, who had grasped the spatial magic [Severance] created by Stella through the memorized magic circle, recklessly manipulated the surroundings based on his overwhelming Demonic energy.

Valencia, having received all sorts of blessings that enhanced her physical abilities, was also using a divinely blessed sword to cut down everything in sight.

Although the speed was slower compared to attacks using sword energy, she was running around at an invisible speed as if possessed by a ghost, cutting down each one.

The most surprising was Uriel.

"Haa!"

Uriel was not just standing idly by.

The newly received treasure sword of the Empire was shining brightly.

The treasure sword, receiving Uriel's Demonic energy, was forging a sharp sword aura.

Receiving my blessing, it was creating a sword aura full of Holy Power.

'A sword aura made with a greatsword...'

The treasure sword's help was certainly there, but it was Uriel's ability to draw out a huge sword aura that clearly resembled the shape of the treasure sword.

'Is it the influence of having completed the Trial of Courage?'

She had become overwhelmingly strong.

Although weaker than Valencia or Evan, seeing her sweeping around with a sword aura made of my Holy Power, which was over 10 meters long, left me speechless.

Each time she swung, dozens of monsters were swept away.

Even after swinging it for a long time, the sword aura showed no signs of weakening, and Uriel did not seem tired.

Mirnel, saying that she didn't expect to take this out so soon, took out a new bow and began a massacre.

Unlike just now, when attacks weren't working, now the attacks were working very well.

The sight of thousands of arrows falling from the sky was a spectacle worthy of being called a masterpiece.

'It's an unbelievable level...'

Everyone was the same.

They were wiping out more monsters in an instant than when they faced the Magic beast of the Frost.

'But...'

This won't do.

We need to find the Demon King's location as soon as possible.

The reason why everyone is going out of their way to block those amorphous monsters is because we cannot allow them to approach this sanctuary where I, who plays the most important role, am located.

I reached out my hand to the floor and sent out waves of Holy Power around me.

'Where are you... where are you?'

No matter how much I searched, I couldn't find him.

The very idea of releasing Holy Power in land full of masterless Demonic energy to find the Demon King was insane, but there was no other way.

How else could I find the hidden Demon King other than this method?

There was no other way but to release Holy Power, praying that I could confirm even a small part of his huge body.

It was then.

'... Wait.'

I stopped sending out the waves at the sudden thought.

'Each of those amorphous monsters is a clone of the Demon King...!'

In other words, if I traced back through them, I might be able to find the Demon King's location.

'It's not certain, but...'

The method of tracing back is not that difficult.

The Demon King is an existence that greedily desires everything. In other words, even if they are his own clones, he will struggle to get back even a little bit of power if they are attacked.

It's a gamble worth trying if I simply push in a weak Holy Power that can be traced.

'The problem is that the amount of Holy Power has to be enough to remain without being eaten up until I can figure out the location...'

The problem was that it would take time to figure that out.

'But there's no other way...'

I spread out my Holy Power and looked around.

We are managing to block them well now, but if this continues to be a war of attrition, it is obvious that the monster will be at an advantage.

'I have to do it.'

I must do it.

I slapped my cheeks a couple of times and then expanded the sanctuary.

As the monsters that touched my sanctuary weakened, they began to be swept away much more easily.

As soon as I secretly infiltrated Holy Power into the monsters that died in the sanctuary, they disappeared into the floor and began to return to their original state.

The direction is…

'Well...'

It disappeared before it could even return.

'I knew I needed time...!'

It also took quite a long time.

Even if I've been playing this game for tens of thousands of hours, I obviously don't know things like this...!

"[Ugh...!]"

I looked around.

Everyone looked exhausted.

There's really nothing good about continuing this war of attrition.

We couldn't last long either.

Uriel couldn't continuously draw out sword energy, and Valencia was still cutting them down, but since she had to cut them down one by one, her stamina was being greatly consumed.

Stella and Argent were annihilating them with spatial magic, which was the most damaging to the Demon King, but spatial magic itself consumes a lot of Demonic energy, so they couldn't overuse it.

Evan was still there, but Evan was the Demon King's ultimate weapon, so we couldn't let him waste his power here.

'Damn Authority...!'

As befitting the Authority to devour anything, it had the crazy Authority to swallow even the attacks that attacked it, so even if it created clones by consuming only a small portion of its power, they were still too powerful.

The signs of defeat were gradually deepening.

If this continues... it might really become dangerous.

'In this case...'

The only thing to do now is to attack the most suspicious place.

Underground, and deep underground, was the most likely place.

I was about to gather Holy Power, thinking that way, when...

"... Don't back down."

I raised my head at the soft touch on my shoulder.

"...?!"

A familiar Thought-form.

I hadn't heard it lately, but I definitely knew that Thought-form.

"[Pope... ?]"

Pope, no...

"The Guardian Dragon is with us!!"

"Waaaaaa!!"

Aselina Sunlight.

And behind her, countless Holy Knights and priests were rushing in.

"What..."

"A, reinforcements?"

"How did they get here...?!"

The arrival of unexpected reinforcements.

How did they get here? Argent looked at Aselina in confusion, but...

"Do you think I wouldn't know the location of my Saintess?"

Argent made an absurd expression at her words with a smirk.

A tracking device that she had attached a year ago because she was worried about Aria.

To be precise, it was a blessing, so it wasn't right to call it a tracking device, but she found her with that?

"Still, it's a relief. It was a bit difficult...!"

Argent gasped for breath as she erased the approaching monster with spatial magic.

"I didn't know you were having such a hard time."

"Shut up and help us quickly. These damn monsters won't die!"

Monsters that would swallow attacks that didn't contain Holy Power, and even if they did contain Holy Power, they would swallow them if they didn't reach a certain level.

However…

"Aria! We have arrived!"

"Protect Aria!!"

"The Light protects us!!"

"In the name of Light, I will judge them!!"

They had secretly set out to defeat the Demon King, hoping that they would not die.

It was already news that had spread to all the priests as well as the Holy Knight Order of the Holy Kingdom.

It was Aselina who had done it to lead everyone.

In the first place, they would have listened to Aselina, who was pretending to be the Pope, but since the timing was the timing, Aselina revealed her

true form.

They would listen to her unconditionally if she became a Guardian Dragon, but they would die for the Saintess, so she mentioned Aria's spirit of sacrifice and led them.

All the Holy Knights and priests set foot in the Demon realm to save Aria.

And…

"Saintess!"

A familiar Thought-form is heard.

A man with a somewhat relieved expression was looking at me.

"Danas..."

"It's been a while... Saintess..."

It was a reunion after a long time.

"... I want to catch up, but the situation is not good right now."

"[Yes. I think we should solve this problem first.]"

Danas nodded at my answer and turned his head.

Danas's armor and weapons, which seemed to have changed greatly.

Even more sharply honed Holy Power.

I sensed it.

"Wipe out those monsters!!"

"Uwaaaaaaa!!"

At Danas's cry, the Holy Knights, blessed by the priests, began to be cut down one by one by the sword strikes containing Holy Power.

Countless monsters began to be swept away by the Holy Knight Order.

The fact that everyone was listening to him.

In other words…

'He became the Commander of the Holy Knight Order...'

Commander of the Holy Knight Order.

It meant that he had risen to that glorious position.

He's really an amazing person.

"Wow... I can't stand the numbers after all..."

Argent muttered with an exhausted expression.

Argent, who didn't know much about spatial magic, had no choice but to activate the spatial magic [Severance] with a large amount of Demonic energy in order to wipe out the monsters, so her Demonic energy was depleted.

Aselina, who approached, put her hand on her, and Argent, who had instantly recovered, looked around her body with a dumbfounded expression.

"Wow... it's the best?"

"I will take the lead. We must find the Demon King's main body."

Aselina said that and flew into the sky.

Soon, a pure white flash of light burst out from the black sky of the Demon realm, revealing a huge dragon dozens of meters long.

"[I will purify everything.]"

A voice full of anger resounded.

It wasn't just the people who cherished the Saintess.

"[Die.]"

Aselina Sunlight.

She was angrier than ever.

4 - The Final Battle

With Aselina's declaration, a massive divine power erupted from the sky.

This place, the Demon Realm, was the place Aselina wanted to incinerate the most.

There was no need to control her power any longer.

Aselina could control her divine breath to not affect ordinary life, so without hesitation, she gathered a golden, shining divine breath in her mouth.

"[Guardian Dragon's Breath]"

A flash of light made of divine power shot towards the ground.

I stared up in a daze at the mythical sight, as if a giant pillar of light was falling from the sky.

Soon, the flash reached the ground and spread in all directions.

'Warm...'

Everyone there felt the warmth.

But it was different for the Calamity.

The breath that would obliterate anything it touched spread in all directions, and the monsters that had been slowly closing in were instantly annihilated.

As Aselina's divine power passed through the forest like a wave, the ruined forest slowly began to regain its life.

Nature began to sprout around the desolate abandoned city.

'Crazy...'

What is this...

Is this Aselina's power?

- Grrr...

I could feel the demonic energy writhing against Aselina's powerful divine power.

It seemed difficult to hide the demonic energy from the powerful divine power.

'Wait, hold on...'

The moment I identified the direction, I was horrified.

I had expected it to some extent.

From the start, with monsters appearing and attacking from all directions, it was hard to believe that it was only on one side.

More than anything, if that huge monster could hide its bulk, it would have to be far away, but to be able to control its subordinates so easily...

It could only be below...!

"[It's below!]"

As I, who was stuck to the ground, quickly identified the location,

Thump...

The ground began to rumble.

Below.

Deep below, it was biding its time, planning to swallow us all whole.

And now...

'This is bad...!'

It was the perfect opportunity to swallow us all at once.

The moment I let out a near-scream of thought, sensing the danger,

Thump-thump-thump!

The ground began to rumble even more violently.

The Demon King, no... the Calamity, was rising up, about to engulf us with its energy, having already reached the surface.

Everyone wore horrified expressions, belatedly sensing the energy.

"Stella! Teleport magic!"

"T-Too late! No!"

The ground began to crack.

In an extremely short moment, I witnessed an unbelievable scene.

'Evan...?'

Valencia swung his sword.

A huge sword aura imbued with blue magic stretched out, greatly widening the cracked ground.

Soon, the fired sword aura disappeared as it touched the Demon King, revealing the Demon King's location between the cracks in the ground.

"!!"

The moment he confirmed that, Evan disappeared.

He kicked off the air with a speed that was impossible to see, plunging into the gap in the ground that Valencia had created.

Argen sweated as he cast his magic.

He grabbed gravity with his incantation and reversed it, forcibly lifting us into the sky.

Argen, realizing that Evan was moving, didn't touch Evan.

The Demon King, recognizing that Evan was being fired at him, moved his body to attack.

But at that moment,

As if she had been waiting, Mirnel fired her bow.

A single, huge, sure-hit arrow was fired faster than Evan, obliterating the Demon King's tentacle that was flying towards him.

Evan, confirming that the obstacle was gone, fell like a meteor with all his acceleration.

'This is...'

A seamless combination, as if they had practiced together.

Evan's holy sword shone.

Slash!

- Keeeeeeeeeek!!

A scream filled with pain that I had never heard before rang out.

A shriek filled with the ambition to devour everything, hatred for the living, and resentment echoed.

Soon, the blackened resentment burst out and was purified,

Crackle!

"...!!"

It split the world.

Evan's sword strike accurately bisected the Demon King's body, leaving a huge scar on the earth.

Evan, confirming that the Demon King's body was split in half, kicked off the cliff and jumped up.

"Aria!"

I nodded and unleashed my divine power.

Argen reversed gravity again, and I, who had reached the ground in an instant, immediately prepared the highest-level purification magic.

'I prepared it in advance...!'

The divine power of purification, the relic of Solanis.

And...

'It's my first time using two relics at the same time...!'

I gripped the relic of the earth tightly in my hand.

It's called using them at the same time, but I'm planning to transform the divine power of purification and unleash an overwhelming force.

I would use most of the divine power in this relic, but it was enough since I could greatly weaken the Demon King.

There was no time to delay.

I gathered the two relics at the same time and aimed them straight into the cracked gap.

"[I'll help too, Doma.]"

Aselina said that and raised her divine power once again.

Divine power rippled from my hand holding the relics and from Aselina's mouth.

Of all places to hide, it had to be underground.

Hiding underground was as good as suicide once its location was exposed.

There was nowhere to hide in the ground, where every place was filled with a medium for transmitting divine power.

With all the divine power gathered, I used the most powerful technique among the purification sacred arts I knew.

A technique that shoots out a powerful flash of sunlight that obliterates everything.

"[Solanis Prism]!!"

A beam of light imbued with the power of the sun shot down into the ground.

"[Guardian Dragon's Breath]"

A pillar of light filled with the divine power of purification accurately plunged into the hole.

There was nowhere to escape.

The Calamity screamed as it was simultaneously struck by the pillar of divine power in its bisected body.

That wasn't the end of it.

The divine power that had been bounced off by the powerful demonic energy was transmitted once again along the walls.

A situation where it was bound to be continuously damaged just by being underground,

Was it the thought that it might really die if it stayed underground like this, or was it instinct?

The Calamity rose upwards without stopping.

But it was already long overdue, so the response was not delayed.

"Teleport."

As Stella's teleport magic was used, we instantly moved far away.

"Saintess! Lady Aselina! Please bless everyone once again!"

Everyone acted as if they had come up with the plan together, even though no one had said anything.

I blessed them without complaint.

Aselina did the same.

In the meantime, the Demon King noticed that we had disappeared, but it was already far too late.

- Keeeeek!

A huge body burst through the ground and rose upwards.

"I've been waiting."

Mirnel held a bow that had somehow become huge in her hand.

"I won't miss this time."

Godly Bow.

A huge arrow of light that was hard to think of as a bow created a wind pressure and was fired.

Accurately towards the Demon King, who had jumped into the sky like a dolphin.

The Demon King, who was trying to gather power to prepare for the arrow flying towards him,

"I would appreciate it if you didn't ignore me."

Valencia, blessed by Aria, jumped onto the Demon King's body.

Valencia, who had landed lightly, offset the Demon King's power that was trying to devour him with the divine power of Aria and Aselina, and began to wildly slash with his still-blessed sword.

While the Demon King, who had not prepared for the arrow due to the divine power penetrating his body, was flustered,

Boom!

- Kiek?!

A huge hole was pierced in the black monster's body, which was hundreds of meters in radius.

The Demon King's body, with a hole pierced in it, slowly began to fall...

Fwoosh...

The Demon King sensed something was wrong.

The movement of his body slowly began to slow down.

- Kiek...?!

No, that's not it.

It didn't slow down.

It stopped.

The world had stopped.

In a world where everything had stopped, Argen was smiling with a nosebleed.

"Where do you... think you're going...!!"

The Archmage of Incantation.

He stopped time by speaking.

To catch a calamity like the Demon King, it would be released quickly unless you touched time.

Argen gritted his teeth and endured.

"Heroooooo!!"

Standing behind him was Evan, who was gathering power.

"Thank you... everyone."

The appearance of the holy sword contained a level of divine power that could not be compared to anything before.

But...

Everyone had forgotten one thing.

Crack!

What had risen above the ground was half of the current Demon King.

The other half was still in the ground,

The Demon King's body, which had risen from the bottom, flew towards Evan like a tentacle.

'I can't block this...!'

There was no way to block it because he was gathering power in the holy sword.

It would be dangerous to allow the attack as it was.

Evan gritted his teeth and was about to move his body to somehow avoid it.

Whoosh! Thwack!

The tentacle that had been fired towards Evan was pierced by a huge piece of ground that had flown from somewhere and slammed into the ground.

Soon,

Bang!

Uriel, who had fallen from the sky, concentrated her power on her greatsword.

The blessings she had received from Aria and Aselina shone and slowly began to grow.

Soon, the greatsword formed a huge shield shape and blocked all the flying tentacles.

"I, I blocked it...!"

In a short time of less than 5 seconds,

"Now's the time!"

During the exchange that took place in that short time, Evan, who had gathered all his strength, took a step forward.

Passing Uriel... and passing Stella,

Mirnel...

And...

"[Defeat him, Evan.]"

Evan, who had even passed Aria, who was cheering him on, jumped into the sky.

Making eye contact with the Demon King floating in the ground and sky, Evan raised his holy sword.

Stella reached out her hand.

Stella's last teleport, which accurately identified Valencia's location, was cast, and the moment Valencia's body disappeared.

"It's over."

An epic to save the woman he loves, transcending time and dimensions.

The time had come to put an end to it by subduing the calamity before his eyes.

Evan swung his holy sword with an indifferent movement.

Soon, the light that burst out from the holy sword was fired towards the Demon King,

……!!

White Night.

Untainted, pure white light covered the Demon Realm.

Along with the Demon King's unheard-of death throes, light began to descend on the Demon Realm, which was covered in black clouds.

The light of the creation of the world, heralding the beginning of a new world.

The Final Battle (Interlude)

The Demon King was almost annihilated.

Of course, because he was a tenacious being, he wasn't completely gone, but he had lost so much power that it was fair to say he was almost annihilated.

We looked down at the Demon King, who was crawling and trying to survive with almost no demonic energy left, with complicated expressions.

"This little thing... is the Demon King?"

I nodded at Danas's question.

Evan's blow... I don't know what kind of technique it was, but even I, who can't see, momentarily saw white before my eyes.

I don't even know what kind of technique it is.

I'm starting to wonder if I can even judge Evan as the hero from the game anymore.

'Hmm...'

He seems a little tired from that blow just now, but it's ridiculous that he's only a little tired after unleashing an attack of that magnitude.

I looked down at the Demon King and sighed inwardly.

"I-It's not dangerous, right...?"

"It might be dangerous if you get close..."

Argen trailed off in response to Yuriel's anxious question.

The Demon King still has his powers, so he could potentially devour us, which would be dangerous, but...

"There's nothing left to eat in this Demon Realm, so it'll be fine."

As Argen said, didn't the Demon King already devour everything in the Demon Realm to fight us?

There's nothing left to eat, so he can't get any bigger here... and even in that situation, he's struggling to survive.

It probably won't be that dangerous, but it would be a disaster if we were devoured, so it's best to be careful.

"Pathetic..."

Mirnel muttered with a complicated expression.

'Yeah...'

The Demon King's appearance was so pathetic.

If someone who didn't know what happened before saw him, they would doubt if he was really the Demon King.

'In the game, he disappeared immediately...'

This is the first time I've seen the Demon King so weakened.

Everyone was looking down at the Demon King with curious or complicated expressions, but only one person,

"..."

Only Evan was silently looking down at the Demon King crawling on the floor with a furious expression. And then...

"...!"

He brought down the Holy Sword without hesitation.

Whoosh...

With a *CRUNCH*, the body of the calamity was completely crushed, lost its power, and disappeared.

"Wow..."

The moment I saw that, I couldn't help but exclaim in admiration.

I couldn't believe that the Demon King, who was described as a powerful being and an unapproachable calamity in the game, was so easily defeated.

And...

'I didn't know spatial magic had such power hidden within it...'

I glanced at Stella.

I could see the compatibility between the demons and spatial magic that no one had ever thought of.

I'm not a mage, so I can't say for sure, but maybe it's because the magic affects "space" rather than the "enemy" that the magic power touches.

No matter how powerful a demon is, they can't do anything if space is distorted.

Even if they have the power to devour anything, they can't possibly eat the distorted space.

'Evan...'

It's all thanks to Evan.

He abandoned the possibility of survival and ran forward, and when I fell into a trap and died, he sacrificed his own life to save me.

It was the future Evan who did it, not the current Evan, but that doesn't mean it wasn't Evan who did it.

In the end, I have to focus on the fact that he did that much for me.

'It's really over now...'

Unlike before, I completely annihilated the Demon King so that the same thing would never happen again.

"Ah..."

The calamity no longer exists.

The moment I realized that,

"Welcome."

I was standing in a place full of pure white light.

"W-Where is this..."

This is definitely a place I've never seen before... wait a minute...

'How can I see...?'

I should have lost my sight a long time ago due to the debuff of the character I created... It's absurd that I can see something.

"Hehe... don't worry, Saintess."

I turned my head in the direction of the voice that was piercing my ear with a sweet tone.

And soon, I was able to meet the owner of the voice.

"You are..."

A familiar energy, and the way she calls me.

There's only one possible explanation for this situation.

"Goddess...?"

"..."

The woman smiled silently.

"Romania..."

"I see... you know about me. That's right. I am Romania, the goddess who created the world..."

The goddess trailed off.

She looked like she was wondering whether to say it or not, but then she opened her mouth as if she couldn't help it.

"I am also the one who brought you into this world."

Perhaps, she was telling a story that I might have already known.

"First of all, I would like to apologize."

The woman, no... Romania, said that and bowed her head to me.

"I'm really sorry."

With a sincere apology.

"...Why did you bring me here?"

"I thought that you, who know this world better than anyone else, are the only one who can save this world."

I couldn't continue the question at that.

Because it's true.

I, who have been playing for tens of thousands of hours, no, I'm so rotten that this world has become my reality, almost lost the world due to the last variable, the Demon King.

Mediocre people will face a terrible death, let alone save the world.

"So you just dragged me here."

"I'm sorry. As a god, there is a clear limit to interfering with the world..."

I know what she means.

She has to save the world, but she can't do it directly, so she gathered all the strength she could and summoned me to this world.

Okay, I understand.

I understand, but...

"...At least you should have explained the situation... I was dragged here as a deaf and blind person and almost died on the street."

"I have nothing to say about that..."

Of course, she has nothing to say.

It's outrageous to ask me to save the world and then almost let me die on the street.

But... well...

"It's okay. It's already in the past, and as a result, I defeated the Demon King."

So she was able to appear in front of me like this.

"I really... I don't know what to say. Thank you so much for saving our world..."

Romania said that and bowed her head to me sincerely.

I had nothing to say, so I made a complicated expression.

It's a thank you from a goddess, not just anyone...

I think that's enough.

Actually... I've never felt despair or pain during my journey...

Honestly, I've only had good things happen to me...

'Ahem.'

Let's not think about this in my head...

"So, what is your wish? I can send you back to your original world. You deserve to be happy."

Romania looked at me with a sad but respectful expression and asked.

Then, she bowed her head slightly and continued.

"The power of the Saintess... is practically a curse. If you, who have endured all that pain and saved so many lambs, cannot be happy... then who deserves it?"

I shuddered at Romania's serious words.

'Uh...'

Who can say that suffering was happiness?

"Even if I try to reduce the pain as much as possible... most children couldn't endure that position."

Romania sincerely admired me, and assured me that I could become a transcendent being because of my amazing achievements.

'No, that...'

I just felt real pleasure.

'Ah...'

To feel happiness as much as possible...?

'Could it be...'

I looked at the goddess with trembling eyes.

I had a bit of a masochistic tendency in my previous life, but it wasn't this bad.

I thought it was strange, but I thought it was a good thing for me, so I just ignored it...

"Your wish... would you tell me?"

The goddess's words urging me to make a wish brought me back to my senses.

Wish, wish...

'Do I deserve to make a wish...?'

I have a lot of personal desires...

Uh...

"I just... I hope that peace will continue so that Evan and the past heroes and saintesses... everyone who lives in this world can live happily..."

Especially Evan.

That dog really needs to be happy.

"Ah..."

Romania misunderstood something again at my words and burst into tears.

"As expected... you are...!!"

Uh, uh...

No...

I really enjoyed it...

That... it felt good too... I was thinking to myself, "This is sex"... uh...

Hmm...

That...

Haa...

'I don't know anymore...'

Good things are good...

I smiled with a detached expression.

1 - Light of Dawn

As time passed, Romania, having stopped crying, wiped away the remaining tears and replied,

"You don't need to worry about that part. What's important now is your happiness."

Romania said that and flicked her fingers.

Then, the surroundings, which had been filled with light just a moment ago, suddenly seemed to twist...

'A garden...?'

It had transformed into a beautiful garden.

And at a table and chairs in the garden, a man with a familiar face sat with a bewildered expression.

Because I could see perfectly with both eyes, I could identify the man sitting in the chair, and I froze.

"E, Evan...?"

"A, Aria?!"

He looked much more mature for some reason, but I knew who he was.

Evan.

He was sitting in his seat, looking at me with a shocked expression.

"As I thought... Hero, you experienced the ruined future."

Romania said with a bitter expression.

At the words "ruined future," my eyes widened.

I could grasp why my appearance had changed.

"Then that appearance is...?"

Romania began to explain as if she had been waiting for it.

"This place is the Celestial Realm where souls can exist... Their form here is their original soul form."

Hearing that, I reflexively touched my body.

And I felt relieved.

'Well... If my original soul state was that appearance, there's no way Evan would have recognized me...'

A soft body that I had already grown accustomed to.

My soul had completely changed.

'That's a relief...'

As I said before, it would have been a disaster if it was my old appearance, so this is better for me.

However...

'Should I call this a relief...'

It was as if all traces of my past life had completely disappeared, so I felt a little strange, but I soon accepted it.

After all, I didn't have any particular attachment to my past life.

Besides...

'There's no reason to go back anymore.'

Now that the reason to return to my original world was gone, it was better for the traces of my past life to disappear.

Feeling relieved inside, I approached Evan, and his bewildered expression became clearly visible.

'I can see him clearly...'

I smiled faintly.

"I believe you've already heard the story through my clone. Once again, I offer my deepest gratitude."

At Romania's words of gratitude, Evan scratched his head and replied,

"It's really okay. I was just doing what I had to do."

Evan said that and turned to look at me.

Knowing what that gaze meant, I naturally avoided his eyes.

"Hehe..."

Romania smiled as she watched us.

"I can see that you two are deeply in love with each other."

"Ugh..."

What kind of twisted hobby is it to bring up that story directly between them?

I felt embarrassed for no reason and turned my head away.

Then Evan also turned his head away, as if he was embarrassed too.

Romania, who was covering her mouth and chuckling at Evan and I, continued,

"For the sake of you two, I have to do my best."

Along with some incomprehensible words.

As I turned my head back to look at Romania...

"...?!"

Romania's hand was filled with divine power.

Romania, who was approaching with her hand filled with divine power and emitting light, said,

"Please accept it."

Soon, intense divine power penetrated my soul.

And...

"Huh...?"

It disappeared.

Wondering what was going on, I looked at Romania, who smiled and began to explain.

"When I first saw you... Aria, your body was at a level where it wouldn't be strange if you died immediately. Your entire body was completely aged and broken."

What does that mean?

When I first came, I only had the demerits of being deaf and blind.

Of course, it was true that my body was weak, but at that time, I didn't even have time to feel like I was more comfortable than I thought compared to the demerits I had put in...

'I was too busy trying to survive...'

I had to become a saintess to do anything.

However...

Now that I think about it, it was a little strange.

I was fine considering all the demerits I had put in.

"And... most of all, you had a body that couldn't bear children."

"... Excuse me?"

Why is that suddenly coming up?

I reacted more than necessary to the sudden words.

"Isn't that a necessary story for you now?"

I felt my head spinning at Romania's smiling face.

'Is it because of the demerits...?'

I didn't think much about it at the time, but now that I think about it, it was strange.

"I tried to fix that body, but... unfortunately, there were clear limitations."

I see.

Hmm.

Come to think of it, I've never had my period.

Evan's expression wasn't very good, perhaps because it was such a shocking story.

"But now you only have happiness left... I can't let you live with such a body. I used my power to make you healthy."

At those words, Evan's eyes widened.

"T, then Aria..."

"Now you can see and hear well. I've fixed all the minor illnesses, as well as the physical condition that was barely maintained by divine power and could have died at any moment."

Romania smiled, telling us not to worry anymore.

"Now you can have children too."

...

Ah.

I see.

...

It's a relief, but...

'Hearing this with Evan next to me is more embarrassing than I thought...'

It's inevitable that I feel embarrassed because she's openly saying that I can have children now.

Ugh... I don't know anymore...

After that, I received various blessings.

Not aging, always being healthy... She said it was something that should be done for the hero who saved the original world, and she gave us this and that, and then, as if she had remembered something, she personally gave something to Evan separately.

When Evan asked what she had given him, Romania secretly told him, and he nodded with a serious expression.

She didn't tell me, saying it was a secret.

How petty.

Anyway, as we spent time talking about this and that, it was time to return.

"Once again, I offer my gratitude. I sincerely hope that you two will be happy."

Thank you for saving the world.

With those words, Romania flicked her fingers, saying she would send us back to where we were.

Then, standing in the garden that was slowly collapsing, I reached out and took Evan's hand.

"... Aria?"

"I want to go back like this..."

What will happen if we actually go back?

Will I really marry Evan?

Will the world really become peaceful?

Is there... nothing left now?

'Am I going to have a baby...?'

Pregnancy.

In the end, Evan and I have to mix our bodies to do that.

It was also proof that we were a couple.

Someday, I will have Evan's child.

Didn't the trials also show me and Evan having intercourse to have a child?

It was something that required so much courage for me.

Of course, other people might wonder why it requires so much courage.

"Ah..."

In the world that was completely breaking apart.

Romania, who was looking at Evan and I with a look of a young couple and a sly smile, waved her hand.

Soon, I entrusted myself to the world that had turned completely white.

Chirp chirp!

"...!"

At some point, I instinctively knew that I had returned.

Looking around, most of the people were looking at me with worried expressions.

"You've come to your senses. Thank goodness... Huh?"

Stella, who was looking down at me and sighing in relief, suddenly looked surprised.

"Aria... you..."

And then she looked at me with trembling eyes.

I can see.

I can see Stella's face.

"C, can you hear me...?"

I can hear.

I can hear her very well.

I can hear Stella's words, which I could only understand with thoughts...

I raised my body with a dazed expression.

And then I looked around.

Looking at the Demon Realm forest where life had begun to grow due to the aftermath of the powerful divine power emanating from Evan's holy sword.

Green fields and vast forests.

And the sound of small life living within it.

Everything that I thought I would never be able to feel since I came to this world.

I can see it.

And I can hear it.

"Is this... really...?"

I thought it was impossible.

Honestly, I thought it would be difficult to defeat the Demon King.

Things that I thought were impossible dreams.

I can see.

I can see very well.

I can hear.

I can hear very well.

I let out a hollow laugh.

Maybe it's a sneer.

Maybe it's a laugh of joy.

But one thing was certain.

"I was alive."

It wasn't in vain.

Everything I did wasn't in vain.

I could be satisfied with that one fact alone.

With just that one fact.

2 - Light of Dawn

The Demon King was defeated.

And I regained my light.

Not only light, but I also regained my hearing.

"Waaaaah!"

"Long live Saintess Aria! Long live Ascelina! Long live Romania!"

"I-Is it really over? Really?!"

The holy knights and priests shouted with emotion-filled voices.

Life was slowly beginning to bloom around the ruined castle, which had been filled with eerie magic, and sunlight was shining on the dark sky.

"This is the Demon Realm..."

Stella said, looking around with a curious expression.

As she said, it would be hard for someone who didn't know to think this was the Demon Realm.

If you just looked around, it would only look like an unexplored territory where people had stopped visiting.

But this was definitely the Demon Realm where we had fought fiercely until just now.

It was just that the disaster that had tried to destroy the world had disappeared, and it was returning to its original form.

Most of the land had already been eaten and died, but seeing life slowly blooming with my powerful divine power...

'Someday...'

A new wind might blow in the Demon Realm as well.

As I felt the blowing wind and looked at the vast land with a wistful expression, Stella whispered from behind.

"It feels... kind of strange..."

"Yeah... It's like, it's the first time I've seen Aria with her eyes open..."

Stella and Uriel whispered to each other and looked at me.

It wasn't just them.

Everyone was looking at me with awkward expressions.

Stella and Uriel, who had mentioned it just now and had been watching me by my side all along...

Evan was even shedding tears, as if he was moved that all my disabilities had disappeared.

"Saintess..."

Surprisingly, Danas was really moved.

I wonder if he thinks he's been rewarded for his efforts.

I don't know what he's thinking...

"Hehe..."

It wasn't a bad feeling.

"[There's not much to see.]"

I was also quite amazed because I could see everything I looked at with my own two eyes, but since the Demon Realm was eaten by the disaster and there was nothing, it wasn't very fun to look around.

Right now, I was just satisfied that I could see something.

I guess this was the first time I had directly opened my eyes in this world...?

No... I don't think that's right.

"[Stella.]"

"Yeah? Why?"

"[Didn't I open my eyes and see my surroundings thanks to the magic Stella made for me a while ago?]"

"Well, you did."

Then I guess that was the first time.

That doesn't mean the emotion is gone, though.

As I thought to myself and was about to answer that I understood, Stella added, as if she understood what I meant by saying this.

"But at that time, I was just tricking you into thinking you were seeing with magic, Aria. You didn't actually open your eyes."

"[Ah...?]"

Come to think of it, that might be the case.

From my point of view, it felt like I had opened my eyes and looked around, but that was just my feeling.

The other people looking at me might have had their eyes closed.

Anyway, at that time, I was tricking my senses with magic, and now I'm completely opening my eyes and seeing the world directly.

Then that's a relief... or should I call it a relief?

The situation was so complicated that my heart was really complicated.

But one thing is for sure,

"Ohoho..."

It wasn't a bad feeling.

Rather, it felt like I was about to fly.

I was just happy.

I felt like I was being rewarded for all the hard work I had done so far... I thought it was a good thing I had worked so hard.

Of course, I also enjoyed pleasure while doing so, so I don't think I deserve to have any more emotions than that.

Anyway...

We couldn't stay here forever, so I started preparing to return to the academy.

"You really never know what's going to happen in the world."

Argent said with a hollow laugh, saying that he thought it would be difficult to return and stepped into this world, but things ended more easily than he thought, and that if he had known this would happen, he would have made a way back in advance and gone to defeat the Demon King.

No... that's a bit shocking...

Isn't that saying that he thought he wouldn't be able to return anyway?

I'm speechless, really.

Whoosh!

"Okay."

Argent, who had confirmed that the gate was properly opened, picked up a stone and threw it in to make sure there were no problems.

Argent looked back at us after seeing the stone naturally pass to the other side and fall to the floor, confirming that the gate was working properly.

"I've opened a door to the academy. I can't maintain it for a long time, so everyone hurry over. Let's talk when we get back."

Everyone nodded at Argent's words and moved to the academy through the gate in order.

At first, the holy knights and priests told me to go first, but I yielded, saying that there might be other ways, but if something happened, there would be no way to fix it without me, so it was better for me to go out last.

Perhaps because of that, everyone looked at me with impressed expressions... but I ignored them as if nothing was wrong.

Why are you so easily impressed by something so obvious?

Anyway...

As my turn passed and it was almost my turn to go over, I crossed the gate without hesitation.

After escaping from the Demon Realm, I looked around and unknowingly exclaimed.

"[Wow...]"

I couldn't help but be amazed by the beautiful scenery, even though I was just looking around.

The inside of the academy building, which used to look like a simple 3D modeling building to me, now looks like an artistic mural.

To be honest, I was even thinking, 'Was it this pretty inside?'

I didn't really think that when I looked around with divine power before.

'No wonder they were so excited.'

I think I know why the kids were so excited when they first came here...

Well, it's partly because it's a really beautiful building, but to be honest, everything in the world looks pretty to me right now.

Unless I see the Demon King or his executives again, I think I'll be happy no matter what I see right now.

'My body is healthier too...'

What should I say about this?

Actually, my body was barely being maintained by the power of the Saintess.

If you think about my age, doesn't the answer to the question of why I'm not growing come out?

The power was so strong that it wasn't obvious, but the demerit I put in at that time was beyond imagination.

It's just a game, so I'm holding on, but if it were reality, my body, which had already deteriorated, would have deteriorated even more and I might have died on the spot.

'My body didn't really hurt...'

My body didn't hurt much even before I became a priest, which is really strange.

Or maybe I took such measures right before I was reincarnated here.

Anyway, only the Goddess knows about that.

I don't regret it.

It's not for nothing that I created a Saintess with potential that no other Saintess can match, especially when it comes to divine power.

If I hadn't put in that demerit at that time, my body wouldn't have been healthy and I wouldn't have survived.

No, I would have survived, but I would have lived a life that was practically dead, so wouldn't that be the same thing?

Me, who was defeated by pleasure...

'Hmm... that's not it.'

You shouldn't make such assumptions carelessly.

Anyway...

'I guess I didn't get my final awakening after all.'

Evan was really amazing.

He's a real madman.

Just to save me... really...

Of course, I also have a lot of potential, so if I keep going like this, I'll eventually awaken.

But awakening isn't something that happens automatically just because you have an insane amount of divine power...

What was it that I lacked so far... it might not be a bad idea to take some time to think about that.

Maybe it's because I have personal desires in my heart.

If that were the case, I wouldn't have been able to complete the final awakening in any situation, so it would have been difficult to defeat the Demon King.

It's better to end everything like this.

True peace has come to the world.

I turned around.

Evan, and the Demon Realm where life was beginning to bloom with my divine power.

Maybe if my divine power disappears, it will be devastated again soon... but now that the disaster no longer exists.

Maybe life will bloom again.

I won't be coming here again, so let's forget about it.

Just as I thought that, Argent, who had confirmed once again that everyone had come out, cut off his magic power.

As the opened gate closed, the split space disappeared.

"Hoo."

He closed the path to the Demon Realm.

Argent sighed.

"I hope I never have to go there again."

3 - Light of Dawn

It took us a very long time to return to our daily lives after defeating the Demon King.

Apparently, since there had been no news until we suddenly defeated the Demon King, we had to properly explain what had happened.

We defeated the Demon King, and the world regained peace.

For the Argent Academy, which had almost collapsed due to a massive demon invasion until recently, it was very important to tell this story.

Therefore, Evan, Stella, and Uriel are probably in the Empire receiving great rewards.

Of course, I refused.

'It's not like I did it for a reward...'

It's too much of a burden to go.

Considering how I'm treated in the Empire, I'm already afraid of how much people will cling to me if I go.

Anyway, I seem to have this image of always working for others as a saintess... so I used that as bait to escape.

The others looked disappointed, but what can I do?

I'm just not suited for that kind of atmosphere.

'Living leisurely is the best...'

Thankfully... or should I say, there were hardly any injuries during this Demon King subjugation.

Even those who were injured were mostly exposed to demonic energy, but unlike ordinary people, they had divine power in their bodies, so the worst they got was a serious injury.

No one was in mortal danger or had already died.

Considering we went to defeat the Demon King, the damage was so minimal that no one believed it when they heard the story.

It wasn't until they properly confirmed on paper that everyone who participated had returned unharmed that they believed it.

'Our compatibility was good.'

In the first place, divine power and demonic energy are mutually destructive.

Demonic energy is weak against divine power, but conversely, demonic energy is also weak against divine power, creating a subtle relationship.

But even the paladin order or priests, who are weaker than us, certainly have divine power, right?

No matter how much the Demon King struggled, he attacked with such a large number, so the power of those monsters themselves had to weaken.

That's why they were swept away even by the attacks of ordinary priests or paladins.

Even if they had authority.

An enemy without authority would be a target of terror.

They would swallow up almost any attack and return even stronger.

The unfortunate thing is that all the troops had divine power.

As a result, the strategy of overwhelming with numbers, which should have worked very well, ended up backfiring.

Moreover, Aselina, the guardian dragon, whom the Demon King couldn't have imagined, blew them all away with her divine breath.

In the end, Evan's final attack was what finished him off.

It's a refreshing sight, but from the Demon King's point of view, he probably felt wronged.

It must have seemed like we knew everything that was going to happen.

'Anyway...'

What was the name of that last skill, really?

I've never seen it in the game or anywhere else...

After finishing treatment and resting for a while, I sat on a chair, swinging my legs back and forth, and thought about Evan.

He's probably getting everything he can from the Emperor and getting ready to come back.

'Hmm... should I have gone with him?'

How would the Emperor react to the fact that his daughter is a member of the Demon King subjugation party?

I was a little curious... but when it came time to go, I only felt annoyed.

That wasn't all.

If he found out that I can see and hear well now, how much more troublesome would it be... that's why I didn't go.

Thinking about Evan receiving rewards in front of the Emperor, I felt a little regretful that I didn't go.

'He wouldn't build a statue, would he...?'

Commemorating the hero who defeated the Demon King. I hope he wouldn't do something like building a statue in the Empire...

"..."

I want to believe he wouldn't... but he probably would.

If he saw that, Evan would probably be in culture shock.

Anyway, it was good at first, but now I regret it...

'I wonder if he's coming back soon.'

It's about time for him to come back.

They probably don't plan to keep him for too long.

They know very well how much sacrifice it cost to try to make a hero their own in the past.

The custom was to let them do what they wanted as long as it didn't harm the Empire.

However, since the students' anxiety hadn't disappeared yet, they needed to use the hero to widely announce that there was no need to be afraid anymore, so they called Evan to the Empire under the guise of an award.

Of course, I'm not very interested in such political stories... now was the time to catch up with each other.

"..."

Aselina and I looked at each other.

Until now, Aselina hadn't said anything, as if she wanted to talk later, but she probably knew.

She probably noticed who I was a long time ago.

How could I not know when the Pope suddenly disappeared and the guardian dragon appeared to stabilize the world?

Other priests and paladins, as well as others in the Holy Kingdom, think that the Pope has temporarily disappeared, but I'm different.

Since I'm old enough to meet the Pope directly, that excuse doesn't work.

Even so, she couldn't say anything and was struggling, but now she's finally decided to speak.

Inside the academy's cafe.

I didn't have time to come to the cafe before, and even if I did, I didn't think much of it because I couldn't see my surroundings.

'The inside of the academy is really well done...'

It feels like a strangely modern medieval city...

Would it be right to call it a modern medieval city?

The architectural style of the past is still there, but it's a harmonious city with modern charm added.

I've been blind since I came here, so I thought my aesthetic sense had dulled...

'It's like a midnight dream...'

Now, not being able to see feels like a midnight dream.

"Aria..."

Aselina called me carefully.

Then there was only one answer I could give.

"[Should I call you sister? If grandpa is okay with it, I can do that too.]"

When I said that in a playful voice, Aselina's eyes widened.

Then she smiled softly.

"I knew it... you knew."

"[I was a little unsure at first... but I felt familiar divine power.]"

"I see..."

Aselina made a subtle expression.

It was a disguise that no one else had noticed except me, so it's no wonder she's reacting like that.

But this is true.

As far as divine power is concerned, thanks to my unbelievable talent, distinguishing people is a piece of cake.

It was true that I couldn't see or hear, but that's why I didn't feel much inconvenience in my life.

Even now, I can distinguish the people around me.

Even if I could see 360 degrees like a 3D model, I don't need to check each person's face to see who they are.

Of course, it's very inconvenient because I can't hear any natural sounds, only people's voices.

But that's all in the past now.

"[... I have something to say too, Sister Aselina.]"

"S, sister..."

She seems happy about something.

Maybe it's a fresh feeling to be called sister after living as a dragon for so long.

I should call her sister from now on.

Anyway... I have a lot to say too.

First of all, there's something I need to say first.

"[Thank you for taking me in.]"

I said that and bowed my head.

Sincerely.

Before, I was obsessed with the idea that I had to become a saintess to start the plan, but now that I think about it with a relaxed mind, I would have died there if it hadn't been for her.

Even if I felt pleasure from pain, dying meant that I would disappear.

I'm not afraid at all.

In that sense, Aselina saved me... no, because Aselina saved me, Evan chose to go back to the past to save me.

As a result, she is the one who saved the world.

At first, I was just trying not to die, but at some point, I wanted to protect this world.

It's all thanks to her.

And personally... it's all thanks to her that I, who had no connections and only disabilities, can speak and walk like a normal person.

So...

"[Thank you... so much...]"

Really...

I couldn't thank her enough.

I thanked her for a long time.

Until she accepted all my gratitude... constantly.

4 - Light of Dawn

After finishing my conversation with Aselina, I returned to the cathedral in the academy.

Once we revealed our identities to each other, words poured out like a waterfall, as if a blocked dam had been opened.

When I saw Aselina in the game, she seemed like a solemn guardian dragon, the Light Dragon Lord, who didn't talk much. But when talking with me, she appeared almost like an ordinary person.

'Was she that worried about me...?'

Most of it was filled with concern for me, so it's no wonder I found it strange.

She even scolded me, asking if it wasn't too hard living as a saint and healing others, saying that even with such powers, the pain doesn't just disappear, and that I've been pushing myself too hard until now.

I'm really fine, though.

"Phew..."

Anyway... it's such a strange feeling.

Until just recently, I was doing all sorts of things to defeat the Demon King... but now the things I needed to do have disappeared.

The northern demon realm, which was busy fending off magical beasts, has become so peaceful that there's no reason to call it a demon realm anymore.

The Empire has been freed from an unprecedented threat, so peace has returned, and the remaining remnants can be easily subjugated.

There may still be people suffering due to internal imperial or political reasons, but for now, the biggest problem has been solved, so it's natural that I have nothing left to do.

The others probably still have plenty of things to resolve, though.

"..."

I looked down at my body.

I'm still not used to it.

'I didn't expect it to be fixed this much...'

Not only did they completely fix my body that was damaged by demerit, but they made it even healthier than before.

The device that supported my powers, which had been like a pleasure generator for me and served as a mental pillar as a saint, still remains.

It's quite amazing how I, who was determined to do anything to return, now think and act like a saint.

'Did they mentally reconstruct me or something?'

I've changed so drastically that even I wonder about it.

They also offered to send me back to my original world, but I refused.

There's no reason to go back there anymore.

"[Hmm...]"

Anyway, my poor health has all been cured... Everything's good, but there's one thing that's still lacking.

'Should I... learn how to read and write...?'

The fact that I don't know the language of this place.

It's natural since I've been living here only listening to thoughts without engaging with the language since I arrived in this world...

'If they were going to return things, they should have taken care of the language too...'

It feels a bit odd to wish for that...

Well, seeing how they granted all my requests, they'd probably solve this minor issue of not being able to communicate right away.

They probably didn't think that even if my eyes and ears returned to normal, I'd still have difficulty having normal conversations because I don't know this world's language.

To begin with, it's strange for a god to struggle with human language.

Besides, language is something you can just learn, so they might think why waste a wish on something like that.

Though I don't think they'd actually respond that way.

I returned to the cathedral and sighed while treating a student with a minor injury.

"I miss Evan..."

After muttering that, I suddenly looked startled.

I had said it thinking no one would hear anyway, but I realized I had unconsciously spoken in Korean and looked around.

Fortunately, there was only a student asking what I had just said, not understanding the content of what I said.

"[Ah, it's nothing.]"

"Is that so... That's good. I heard that the Saint can now see with both eyes and hear with both ears..."

"[The goddess blessed me for defeating the Demon King.]"

Honestly, I thought it was being returned as a wish.

I was surprised when they healed me, saying they were sorry for not being able to help until now after defeating the Demon King.

'I wonder if this one knows.'

Since they just came in from outside, they might know.

"[Um... is it alright if I ask something?]"

"Of course!"

I chewed on my lips as I faced the student who smiled, saying I could ask anything I was curious about.

With an expression of contemplating whether I should really ask this or not, after pondering for a while, I finally made up my mind.

Why should I be hesitating so much about asking where Evan is?

Come to think of it, it's frustrating.

'I'm the one who said I wouldn't go.'

If I had known I'd feel this lonely, I should have gone with him.

Talking with Aselina wasn't bad, but that's something I could have done later, isn't it?

Aselina would be sad if she heard this thought, but... I couldn't help feeling this way.

"[I was wondering if you might have any information on where Evan... the Hero, might be right now?]"

It's already been a week, and he's still not back.

"Huh? Haven't you heard?"

"[What?]"

"The Hero said he would return today. He should have arrived by now..."

The moment I heard those words, I ran outside.

"I think..."

Leaving behind the student whose treatment I had just finished.

'Why didn't he at least give me a heads up if he was coming back soon...!!'

We're friends after all, it's not right if I'm not the first one to welcome him back.

'Fr-friends... though it's a bit different...'

Now that we've defeated the Demon King and done everything we needed to, there's only one thing left between Evan and me.

'Are we... really getting married...?'

Becoming lovers, and even getting married...

Actually, even until I met the goddess, I was just thinking if it would really happen, but now that I hear Evan is coming, such thoughts keep coming up and it's quite... well...

I felt like I might be more of a pervert than I thought.

"Phew..."

As I arrived at the entrance, I immediately saw a carriage approaching in the distance.

Could Evan be in there?

As I watched the carriage with such expectation, it soon arrived right in front of me.

And then,

"Ah, Aria?"

It's Evan's voice.

Even without hearing it through thought, I could tell he was calling my name since my name is Aria.

"Were you waiting here?"

"[Ah... yes, that's...]"

As I saw him getting off the carriage and approaching me, I unconsciously took a step back.

'Wh-what is this feeling...?'

Just a little while ago, I was only thinking about wanting to meet Evan, but now that we're actually meeting, I'm feeling burdened. What's going on?

I don't understand my own feelings.

Maybe that's why.

"Ah, Aria?!"

"[I-I'm sorry...!]"

I, who had been welcoming Evan with an expectant expression until just now, suddenly found myself running away from him.

Without even knowing the reason myself.

"Why did she suddenly run away...?"

Evan muttered with a puzzled expression.

Seeing that she came out here to welcome him, it seems she must have missed him.

But she ran away right after meeting, shouting an apology, leaving him feeling at a loss for what to do.

"Wow... I think this is the first time I've seen Aria like this..."

Stella, who had been watching from the side, muttered with a dumbfounded expression.

"I wonder if Aria is okay... She looks very troubled."

"Well, she's probably not used to facing Evan's face in reality."

Although she might have seen it before through her magic, this is a peaceful situation where everything has ended and all her duties as a saint have been resolved.

In such a situation, if the first person she sees with her newly restored sight is the person she likes...

Wouldn't anyone react like that?

Stella thought this might be the real opportunity.

"What are you doing, Evan?"

"Huh?"

"If you don't chase after her now, things will get more drawn out. Go and confess to her properly."

"Wh-what?!"

Evan stammered in surprise at Stella's words, but Stella just laughed.

"Or should I help? Want me to send you to where Aria is?"

As she said this while gathering magical power, Evan waved his hands in refusal.

Then his expression turned serious.

"... You're right. I need to take action here."

"If you know, then go quickly. We'll take care of the remaining troublesome matters."

Aria ran away to the forest, not even to the academy.

It could be dangerous if we don't find her quickly.

"Thanks, Stella, Uriel."

"Enough, just go quickly."

"Good luck~"

With Stella and Uriel's encouragement, Evan ran into the forest.

In the silence that returned, Stella rested her chin on her hand and smiled.

"That was a good show."

Aria deserves to be happy.

Evan will surely make that child happy.

Where else could you find a man who would try so hard for one woman?

Stella closed her eyes.

She sensed that there was nothing more she could do.

But she didn't feel bad about it.

From now on, she had hope that they could peacefully... live like friends.

Light of Dawn (Interlude)

I know that escaping from here is pointless.

I don't even know why I'm doing this.

How can I not know my own heart? It sounds strange even to me, but I don't have the luxury to care about that right now.

I rushed out into the forest, and then suddenly wondered what I was doing, and sighed.

'He must have been surprised...'

If I was going to run, I should have run towards the academy. I don't know what I'm doing.

Now I can see and hear... everything I could ignore before is coming back as stimulation, so it's not easy to just endure it.

Seriously... maybe I was able to function as a saintess because I couldn't see or hear.

'Haa...'

Let's go back.

What's the point of staying here?

I repeatedly vowed to myself that I would never run away if I faced Evan again, and I started walking back towards the academy...

"Aria!"

"Eek!"

W-w-w-what?!

'D-did I just make a noise...'

Before, I was always using divine power to sense the surrounding space and thoughts, so I couldn't imagine someone sneaking up and calling or touching me.

Right?

How many people would be surprised if they knew someone was coming?

Sensing the space with divine power was like my eyes back then... I used it like breathing, but now that I can see, I naturally don't use it.

Even if I don't use it, I can see around me... so I really don't use it.

I feel like a fool for thinking that I've been using it for years, so how could I not use it just because I can see now? Habits don't just disappear, it's obvious.

Is that why?

I came all the way here and didn't use divine power to sense my surroundings, and then I got caught by Evan and screamed like a weirdo.

"A-are you okay...?"

Evan asked me with a slightly cautious voice because I suddenly screamed.

'How could I be okay...!'

I'm so embarrassed.

I've always shown only the image of a noble saintess, but I started to reveal my original personality little by little around the time when there wasn't much time left until the Demon King subjugation.

I was trying to build up a gradual release, but now that's all gone...!

"[Ugh...]"

Evan, of course, had no idea about the inside story, so he seemed flustered, wondering what to do, thinking that I was really surprised.

It was funny to see the guy who had been looking so seasoned and world-weary until recently turn into a simpleton.

'... I'm not in a position to say that...'

The one who was really deceiving was me.

"[Ahem...]"

I cleared my throat.

"[I-I'm okay... I was just surprised...]"

"I guess... it's hard to adjust?"

"[I guess so... I think I've tried looking around with magic... but it's amazing to be able to see and hear directly in reality like this...]"

It's really amazing.

My reaction just now is also amazing...

'Haa...'

I'm going crazy.

"... Pfft... Pwahahaha!"

Evan, who had been staring blankly at me as I sighed inwardly, suddenly burst out laughing.

Huh?

I'm dying of embarrassment because the image I've built up so far has been shattered, but Evan seems to be having a great time.

"[Is it funny...?]"

"H-haha... S-sorry... It's just so funny... Pfft..."

Isn't it too much to laugh there?

I was being serious.

Seeing him laugh makes me feel drained.

"[I'm upset...]"

"It's a side of you that you only showed me, right? I'm happy."

"[...]"

That's too much.

That's a foul.

All the thoughts that came to my mind disappeared as soon as I heard that.

"[I don't know anymore...]"

I don't know.

I said that and looked up at Evan.

Evan must have jumped in with me because there were blades of grass stuck to his body here and there.

Why is he so clumsy?

I went over and took off the leaves stuck to his clothes and said.

"[I'm sorry for acting like this suddenly. How should I say it... I was a little complicated in my heart.]"

In fact, I should have answered Evan's confession a long time ago.

Maybe Evan was just waiting for that.

Maybe the reason he accepted my refusal to follow him so easily was because he wanted me to think seriously about the matter and give him an answer, so he was giving me time to think.

I don't know which one it is, but at least one thing I can say for sure is that Evan was trying to be considerate of me.

To come all the way here and still only know me.

Seriously, what did he see in me to be so infatuated with me... I'm honestly curious.

The only image I've shown is the standard image of a saintess...

Rather, unlike other saintesses, I've shown a lot of gory and grotesque... shocking images, so it would be strange if he didn't get turned off, but to be so infatuated that he would give me his liver and gallbladder is really strange.

But what can I do?

I know.

Love is never simple, and there's no need to explain it... there's no way to explain it.

Isn't there a saying?

There's no need for a reason to like someone.

Trying to explain such a reason is a low-level act.

I didn't think much about that saying before.

I've never been in love... I've never liked someone, I've never even thought about that person, so how could I know about such feelings?

I've only imagined the feeling of love by watching romance stories or romance comics, romance novels... things like that, so that saying was understandable but not relatable to me.

But it's different now.

Why?

Just looking up at Evan makes my heart pound.

I'm too embarrassed to make eye contact, and I feel lonely when Evan isn't around.

I knew he was handsome before, but now that I'm looking at him directly with my own eyes, his face is shining.

Seeing how far I've come, I think I'm completely blinded by love, but who cares?

If you like someone, you just like them.

There's no reason to like someone.

And...

'There are plenty of reasons for me to like him.'

He's handsome, he has a considerate and kind personality, his character is like a bodhisattva, his ability has already been proven as a hero who defeated the Demon King, and he's a sunflower who only looks at me and is willing to die for me, a true romantic of this era.

There's no one in this world who wouldn't like someone who only looks at them.

Even if they're a villain who wants to destroy the world.

So...

"[Evan.]"

It's time to accept him this time.

It wasn't as difficult as last time.

Now it's just... a confirmation.

I went over to Evan.

"..."

Evan looked down at me with a tense expression.

His arms were trembling, as if he was agonizing over whether to hug me or not.

Look at this.

He cherishes me this much... he's running after me because he likes me that much.

I can't betray Evan here.

"[Are you really... okay with me?]"

I ask again.

I didn't give him a proper answer last time.

We just... connected for a moment.

That was enough of an answer.

But it's a little different now.

I wanted to hear it directly, I wanted to hear it from myself.

If he's really okay with me.

If he's okay with me as a 'woman'.

Of course, Evan's answer was the same.

"Yeah."

Really damn much.

"I still love you, Aria. More than anything... my treasure that I can't trade for anything."

His answer was the same.

"[Hehe...]"

My treasure.

I've never heard that word from Evan before.

Is it because the personality and experience of the future Evan have been combined?

I felt that Evan had changed a little.

But what's the problem with that?

In the end, Evan is Evan.

I smiled.

And I answered.

The words I've been wanting to say all along.

"[I love you too.]"

Maybe the reason I came to this world was to say these words.

Now it's time to fully admit it.

I am in love with Evan.

At this moment, or maybe forever.

I'm not a saintess, and I'm not a veteran of this game.

I was just a woman.

1 - After Party

Having confirmed our feelings for each other, we returned to the academy.

"Aria! And Evan! Where have you two been?"

Stella, startled by our return, rushed over and asked.

It seemed everyone was worried because I had suddenly run off, and Evan, surprised by my actions, had followed. Even Uriel was looking at us with a questioning expression.

Had I caused trouble again with my impulsive behavior?

'I was strange even to myself back then...'

In any case, even if I didn't understand my own actions, it was true that I had caused concern, so it was right to apologize first.

"[I'm sorry. I was so troubled... I ran away without realizing it...]"

I said, promising that it wouldn't happen again.

Stella, wearing a strange expression, squinted at us, but then seemed to understand the situation and sighed.

"Well... if nothing happened, that's all that matters, right?"

She chuckled, as if saying, 'what's done is done.'

Sensing the eased atmosphere, Evan and I smiled and headed back towards the academy.

"So, you two finally worked things out?"

"...Thanks to you."

Evan replied with a small smile.

Stella giggled and nudged Evan with her elbow.

Something must have happened between them while I wasn't around.

For some reason, seeing that...

"[...Stella, Evan might be in pain.]"

"Huh? It's just a little... um? Uh-huh?"

It wasn't like Stella, just a mage, could really hurt Evan, a Sword Master who was unmatched among swordsmen and heroes, by nudging him with her elbow.

I knew that.

But for some reason, just seeing Stella getting close to Evan made me feel strangely agitated, like my insides were boiling.

Perhaps that's why I scolded Stella without realizing it.

But...

"Heeeeeeng...?"

Stella looked at me with an intrigued expression.

Oops.

I could immediately tell that my behavior was strange, so there was no way Stella wouldn't notice.

Stella, realizing that the situation was quickly turning complicated, wore a sly smile.

"What's wrong, everyone?"

Uriel, not understanding what we were talking about, tilted her head and asked.

I was relieved.

I couldn't be sure how Uriel would react if she found out about my feelings.

She might not be able to maintain her image as a saint and show a disgraceful side.

So, it was best for me if Uriel remained ignorant.

Yes... I really think it's best if she just doesn't know...

I'm too embarrassed to say...

I turned my head away, feeling embarrassed.

"Hehehe... someone's embarrassed?"

Stella just chuckled and teased me.

What should I say?

It was a little annoying.

I wanted to pretend that I didn't care.

Perhaps that's why, even though I would normally have laughed it off, I boldly clung to Evan and replied.

"[I, I'm n-not embarrassed at all!!]"

Failed.

I might have been able to deceive them with words, but unfortunately, I was communicating through thoughts.

Thoughts inherently reveal one's true feelings, so the stronger the thoughts, the stronger they would be conveyed.

It was impossible to hide it...

"Pfft, Pwahahahaha!"

Stella burst out laughing as soon as she heard my thoughts.

I must have been very funny, trying to hide it but ultimately revealing it through my thoughts.

My face flushed, and I lowered my head.

This is the most embarrassing...

"Ah, Aria..."

Evan turned his head slightly.

"C-cute..."

Stella stared blankly at Evan, who openly called me cute.

It wasn't just Stella.

Even I, the subject of his words, stared blankly at Evan.

'Cute...?'

I had never heard that before in my life.

In my past life, I had nothing to do with being cute, and in this world, I had been living as a saint from the very beginning, so I had never heard anyone call me cute.

The fact that the first person to call me cute was Evan, of all people, was a big deal to me.

Feeling dazed and like my face was burning, I stopped thinking.

After a moment,

"You two are... sickeningly sweet..."

Stella, who had been watching from the side, muttered in disbelief.

Sickeningly sweet...

I don't know...

I'm just... dazed...

I really didn't expect to hear those words from Evan...

"[U, ueee...]"

"Is she broken?"

We had been talking about such things just a moment ago, but actually having such a romantic conversation...

I really don't think it suits me... That's what I thought.

I definitely think that...

'It might not be... bad...'

It definitely wasn't a bad feeling.

Especially since it was Evan who said it.

Stella glanced around at the strange atmosphere between Evan and me, then smiled.

"You two should just go inside and do whatever you want. You deserve it."

Go inside and do whatever we want.

Evan's face flushed slightly at those words.

I was feeling it too, but the words 'do whatever you want' probably meant 'that,' right...?

'M-me and Evan doing that...'

I had tried it during the trial before, but we didn't really do anything.

We just kissed before returning to reality...

I had been taking it in stride until now, but now that I was practically dating Evan with marriage in mind, I knew that it was something that I would have to do someday, so I felt strange hearing those words.

And Stella's expression as she said that... seemed somewhat wistful, which made me feel even more strange.

She was definitely smiling, but her eyes weren't.

If someone else saw us, they might think that she didn't like the fact that we were together, or that Stella liked Evan... but I knew.

It was definitely a happy thing, but it didn't feel that happy.

It wasn't certain that everything had ended happily, and the things that had happened to get us here couldn't be erased.

Perhaps Stella still had lingering feelings.

Thinking about the Demon King who had died so meaninglessly.

I closed my eyes.

...

Or maybe she was just like a parent who felt complicated emotions about their beloved daughter becoming happy but having to let her go.

I looked at the two of them.

They had been supporting us all this time, hadn't they?

I thought it was wrong to just leave them here and go on a date with Evan.

Of course, I wanted to be with Evan, but I thought it was wrong.

No, beyond being wrong, I just didn't feel comfortable.

I looked up at her and opened my mouth.

"...Why?"

Stella, taken aback by my sudden approach and gaze, asked with a flustered expression.

What was there to say?

I was the one who said that I didn't like the idea of leaving with Evan, so the only thing I could do here was...

I hugged Stella.

"U, ugh?!"

Stella made a strange noise and trembled, seemingly flustered by my sudden hug.

I hugged her even tighter.

She had been suffering inside as much as Evan, or perhaps even more, so it would be too bad to just leave after I started dating Evan.

So, there was only one answer.

"[Would you like to have a wrap-up party with us?]"

We should have a wrap-up party... right?

To commemorate us, who had endured so much and finally succeeded in defeating the Demon King.

"W-wrap-up party...?"

Not only Stella but also Uriel looked surprised at my words.

Yes.

Even if it's just a small one... to comfort each other for our hard work.

I felt like I would only feel at ease if we did that.

I felt like I had put them through a lot because of my selfishness.

I was just... sorry.

Very, very sorry.

2 - After Party

The after-party was held simply in my room.

I just thought it was right to have it in my room since I was the one who suggested it.

…

Though, to say it's just my room is a bit of a stretch, since it's also Stella's room.

Anyway, it's where I live.

On the table were snacks I'd made and some alcohol.

'Alcohol?'

It might sound strange to say alcohol, but we are, 'at least,' adults…

We could drink as much as we wanted.

'First time drinking it.'

I had drunk before in my previous life, but that was alone, and the alcohol I drank then was very different from what I'm drinking now.

At least I could tell that what I was drinking now was more high-end than what I had before.

The alcohol I drank back then was cheap stuff you could buy at a convenience store, and I wasn't much of a drinker anyway.

You probably know what I mean just from that.

Oh, and for the record, the food was made simply with ingredients bought from a store inside the academy.

I cooked just fine even when I couldn't see, and now that I can see and hear well, my cooking skills have only improved.

Evan, after trying the food I made, widened his eyes and asked.

"Umm…?! D, did Aria really make this?!"

Evan asked with a surprised expression after putting the food I made in his mouth.

Come to think of it, Evan had never eaten anything I made before.

If that's the case, then that reaction wasn't strange.

"I've had it a lot~"

Stella giggled next to him as Evan was in shock after eating the food I made.

I made it for her quite often when we were together.

Ever since she stopped holing herself up in her room and started coming to the academy more often, she hardly ever got a meal from me, though.

She seemed to want to tease Evan.

"But haven't you had it before?"

Yuriell asked, tilting her head, but that wasn't really important.

It was clear that Evan was moved by the fact that I made it myself.

Now that we're in love and engaged, isn't he showing that reaction to flatter me?

No one dislikes being told they're a good cook.

"Haa… I'm comfortable. As expected, having a small party with people you know is the best."

"[The parties held at the Imperial Palace weren't very fun, I presume.]"

"No… well… Yuriell is probably the only one who likes partying in places like that."

When Stella asked if Evan didn't like those places either, Evan nodded slightly.

I guess no one here likes that kind of atmosphere.

Above all, it's probably because we've never had a party like this before.

Of course, we received all sorts of congratulations at the Imperial Palace, so this isn't the first after-party, but there were a lot of unwelcome people at that party, so it probably wasn't a party we enjoyed comfortably.

From that point of view, wouldn't it be good for everyone to have another after-party like this?

"Hmm… Don't you enjoy meeting friends you occasionally talk to?"

Yuriell, who isn't interested in politics, asked, resting her finger on her chin as if recalling those memories, but no one agreed with her.

None of the nobles here are familiar with those social gatherings…

"Everyone is just busy trying to flatter us and make connections…"

"[I see…]"

Would they have acted that way even if they saw me?

I heard that the Empire likes me a lot…

They even built a statue of me in their imperial city and honored me, saying they wouldn't forget the sacrifice I showed.

Of course, I've done a lot for the Empire, but I don't know if it's necessary to go that far…

'I'm being praised by the Holy Kingdom and even the Empire…'

Ahem.

It might sound like I'm showing off too much, but that's my public image…

Even though I was able to do the comfortable saintess thing because my tendencies were maximized, I still think I was amazing.

How many people have I saved with these hands?

Thanks to my divine power, I might be a little lacking in holy law, but there are no restrictions on healing someone… Originally, the fact that you get hurt and suffer as much as you heal is a penalty for powerful divine power, but for me, that penalty came as pleasure.

'Even the goddess didn't notice…'

Besides, my faith is at the highest level ever, I know for sure that God exists and I even know what she looks like, so my faith has completely returned to my power.

That's why I was able to push through with overwhelming output even though my level and skill were relatively low.

Thinking about it now, I did a lot of crazy things.

'I should be careful now…'

The Demon King has already been defeated.

The disaster, one of the biggest reasons the world was going to be destroyed, has also been defeated, and there is no other reason for war to break out right now.

It's safe to say that the world we live in now has entered an era of peace.

Of course, if I wanted to be a truly sacrificial saintess, I would have gone to areas where there are still many people in need, even in this era of peace, and used this power.

But there's a reason why I can't do that now.

I intertwined my fingers with Evan's hand next to me.

"A, Aria?"

Evan, startled by my sudden interlocked fingers, called out to me, but regardless, I just smiled and looked up at Evan.

Before, he looked like a 3D modeling clay, so I didn't feel like he was handsome, but now I know why so many people liked Evan.

I can't believe that such an amazing person is my husband.

"Oh my… You guys are so sweet."

Stella, who was watching us, clicked her tongue and said that.

"Wasn't this a party to commemorate our party? Is it okay to do that in front of us?"

"[Ah… that's right. I'm sorry.]"

I did it without realizing it.

I immediately pulled my interlocked hand away and smiled awkwardly.

I still can't believe that I can see and hear.

Well, seeing is just seeing… I can just accept it.

Actually, being able to hear is good, but I can't help but feel like it's only half as good.

'Even if I can hear the voice, I don't know what the words mean…'

Aside from that, this is truly the happiest moment for me.

"Haa… well…"

Stella glanced at us and smiled.

"I was wondering what would happen at first, but you guys finally defeated the Demon King. Without anyone dying."

"... I guess so."

"[I'm surprised too…]"

Honestly, I was purely surprised.

I wondered if that made sense.

'No...'

The opponent was the Demon King, but no one died.

The holy knights and priests were injured, but only slightly exposed to demonic energy.

If they didn't have holy power, they would be eaten away and die, but if they were holy knights or priests with holy power, they didn't have to worry about a small amount of demonic energy.

They just felt a sharp pain.

Anyway, that was the extent of the damage… The Demon King, who swallowed up the entire demon world to survive us, eventually met his end in complete annihilation.

It was our victory.

"I feel relieved… but also empty."

"I feel empty too. But…"

Yuriell trailed off at Stella's words, then smiled.

"The world won't be destroyed… Isn't that enough?"

We were also going to receive reasonable compensation for that.

It was a happy ending among happy endings.

So at this moment, we can have a more enjoyable time than ever before.

"Let's just comfort each other and indulge in joy now. Isn't that why we gathered?"

"Yeah, we've never gathered like this before… I'm happy. But it's a little strange to hear you say that."

Stella chuckled and raised her glass.

Soon, we clinked glasses with each other.

"Ugh… I have to go now."

As the after-party was slowly coming to an end, and the atmosphere was heating up because we had drunk quite a bit, Stella said that and got up from her seat.

Yuriell was flustered when she suddenly tried to leave and asked what was wrong, but…

"Stop talking nonsense and come out too."

"Y, yes?"

"It's good to give them space at times like this."

I don't know what you're talking about.

"[Aww, where are you going… We should go for round two…]"

"Round two, my foot. Where did you learn to say that? Just go cling to your husband over there."

Stella chuckled and grabbed Yuriell, who was half out of her mind, and then,

"I'm leaving. Teleport."

She disappeared in an instant.

"[… Huh?]"

Stella and Yuriell disappeared with the wind…

…

Where did she go…?

I looked back at Evan.

Evan was also looking at me with a flushed face.

We exchanged glances.

And the night was getting deeper…

3 - After Party

In a room filled with soft light, Evan and I were avoiding eye contact, sizing each other up.

'Even so, teleporting away is too much...!!'

I understand it's tough, but instead of making up a reasonable excuse to slip away naturally, leaving us so obviously alone and then just running away...

What are we supposed to do, left in the room without a clue?

It's supposedly giving us space, but I could believe she just couldn't handle the atmosphere between us and ran off with Uriel.

I wanted to call Stella out on it, but there was no point in calling out someone who had already run away.

Grrr, Stella, you little...!

Right now, she was nothing short of a traitor to me...

"... Aria."

"... Hicc...!"

Left alone, I made a strange noise without realizing it when Evan called my name.

"S-Sorry! Did I startle you...?"

"[N-No... I'm not... Cough...]"

Why would I be startled?

Shiver, shiver.

I pretended to be nonchalant as I answered, but for some reason, my body was trembling with tension.

'No, why am I trembling...!'

It was too difficult to maintain my poker face like I always had.

I used to do it without a second thought, but ever since I could look Evan in the face, I couldn't do it as well in front of him, and I couldn't control my feelings.

And that wasn't all.

I was drunk now, so it was even harder to control my feelings.

Just looking at Evan made my heart flutter and race... I was too embarrassed to make eye contact, and I felt like I was going crazy.

'He looks even more handsome, damn it...'

Is this the effect of alcohol?

Evan's face, lit by the soft light, seemed to glow.

Before I became this body, I never understood how male and female friends who only saw each other as friends in fiction or reality could hook up after drinking.

Now I think I understand the feeling.

It's ironic that I'm empathizing from the female side, not the male side.

"Um... can I come closer...?"

Unlike me, who was hesitating, Evan seemed half-ready and said that as he slid closer to me.

He only asked, but in reality, it was more like, "I'm just going to come over," but I couldn't say anything.

'Eep...'

Just Evan coming closer made my whole body tingle, so I couldn't say anything and just gaped.

Is he, is he really out of his mind...?!

'Ugh, ugh...'

My vision is spinning.

It's strange, my Authority shouldn't allow my body to be harmed, so I thought it would treat being drunk as a symptom and heal it with Authority, but instead, it seems like I'm getting drunker.

"Aria."

"[Y-Yes!]"

"... What's wrong...?"

"[Ugh... hoo...]"

I'm sorry.

My head feels like it's going to explode.

Dizzy, I leaned to the side and naturally ended up leaning on Evan's shoulder.

'Ah...'

I thought I should get away quickly, but Evan's speed of action, already determined, was incomparable to anything before.

Before I knew it, Evan raised his arm and hugged me.

'A-Aaaaaah...'

Someone help me.

No, save the Saintess.

No, just save me.

I really can't take it anymore if this keeps up.

That's when it happened.

"... I'm sorry for everything."

"[... Huh?]"

Suddenly?

As soon as I heard those words, I felt my dizzy mind clear up.

"Because I'm incompetent... I said I wouldn't let you suffer anymore, that I wouldn't let you get hurt... but in the end, I couldn't stop you from sacrificing yourself."

Evan's expression was filled with sadness as he said that.

What does that mean, I thought for a moment.

I remembered that Evan had a lot of scars.

To be precise, the current Evan... was an Evan who had already lost me once.

It's not that the current Evan, with that memory and feeling fully his, is the same as the future Evan.

After all, they are the same person, so there's no point in distinguishing between the two.

But Evan was still suffering, unable to bury that memory, that event that must exist in history, in the past.

The moment I realized that.

"[... You're so stupid.]"

I threw away the mask.

So easily.

"... Huh?"

Evan, who had been crying with a sad expression, widened his eyes as if he didn't expect me to say he was stupid.

He's so clueless.

He's really clueless.

I've felt that way before, but I'm so dumbfounded by his apologizing and blaming himself even in this situation.

No, now it's beyond dumbfounded and I'm starting to get angry.

I frowned and sent intense thoughts to Evan.

"[How can you say that? I don't have that memory or experience of sacrificing myself for everyone... what am I supposed to say if you're suffering and crying like that by yourself?]"

"B-But..."

"[But what... I don't know how someone can be so kind that they're apologizing for something that hasn't happened and will never happen.]"

Ha.

This guy is just a fool.

But he's also unnecessarily kind and cool, and he's the most caring and kind person in the world to me.

That's the most infuriating thing.

I couldn't stand it anymore, so I just lunged at Evan in a fit of anger.

"... Mmph...?!"

"..."

While kissing him.

But it was different from before.

Before, we had only kissed lips, but now...

"Mmph... haa... slurp..."

I put my tongue in Evan's mouth and was directly connected to him.

Evan was flustered at first, but he seemed to instinctively realize that I had no intention of stopping, and he hugged me tightly from the position he was in.

I climbed onto Evan's lap and hugged him, so we were hugging each other.

The position looked very dangerous, so it wouldn't be strange to fall off right away, but...

We were already doing something more important than that, so no one cared.

Rather, we hugged each other tighter and twisted around to get into a more comfortable position and connect more deeply, continuing the kiss... and in that state, Evan and I explored each other's mouths for a long time.

How long had it been?

"... Phew..."

"Haa... haa..."

I started to run out of breath first from the rough deep kiss, and Evan, realizing that, pushed me away slightly to be considerate, and we naturally moved away.

Slurp.

A long strand of saliva, mixed with each other's saliva, stretched between my tongue and Evan's.

We exchanged breaths for a long time, and our minds were hazy from the lack of oxygen...

We looked at each other with affectionate eyes.

Maybe we both thought at the same time.

No, maybe we didn't even have time to think.

But the feeling I felt was... that it had boiled over to the point where I couldn't stand it anymore,

And...

"Evaaan..."

I had long been captivated by the desire to make love to the man in front of me.

I pushed Evan away and laid him down on the bed.

With my strength, it would be impossible to push Evan away, but Evan was also caught up in the atmosphere, so he laid down on the bed as I pushed him.

"A-Aria..."

"Evan... Evan...♡"

There's no time to send thoughts.

With the last bit of reason, I barely understood Evan's words with thoughts, and I called Evan's name directly with my mouth and clung to Evan's body and shook it.

I don't know other words, but the name is the same name I know...

As I clung to him and called his name, Evan hugged me and said.

"I love you, Aria."

I didn't understand what that meant.

But I could understand what it meant.

The words "I love you."

I didn't want to answer that word with thoughts.

I wanted to say it directly... so that all my senses, which had returned thanks to Evan's efforts, could recognize it.

I wanted to say it directly with my mouth.

"I wuv you... Evaaan..."

I smiled brightly and responded to Evan.

Although I didn't know the language and babbled, the meaning of the words was definitely conveyed to Evan.

The moment I said I loved Evan, we didn't need to stop anymore.

"Ehehe...♡"

Without anyone saying anything, I, who was already on top of Evan, smiled happily and started first.

It was the beginning of a long, long night.

4 - After Party

I don't know why I ended up in a position where I was on top of Evan, but we were already half out of our minds to make such a judgment.

Especially with the alcohol I had just drunk, it was even harder to make rational decisions.

Evan reached out, embraced me, and pulled me into his arms.

"...I'll undress you."

"Y-yes..."

At my response, Evan carefully reached out and began to undress me.

It was a gentle touch, as if he was worried that I might be in pain or hurt.

The dress-like lingerie was removed, revealing my bare, perky breasts.

'Ah, I wasn't wearing one...'

I didn't think it was necessary to wear one since they were small anyway, but seeing them like this made me feel embarrassed.

Still, I was wearing bottoms, so that was a relief.

As Evan took off my clothes, he raised his upper body, leaving me embraced by him wearing only panties.

"Beautiful."

"Ugh..."

I was too embarrassed to meet Evan's face as he smiled and said that while looking into my eyes, so I quickly turned my head away.

That's when it happened.

"...This is..."

Evan, who had been smiling and looking at me, lowered his gaze and widened his eyes.

"A curse...?"

"H-huh...?"

Why suddenly a curse?

Thinking that, I looked down and saw the succubus mark on my lower abdomen.

'Why is this...?'

Why does this exist?

The goddess clearly said that she had healed everything that was problematic while fixing my body, but I couldn't understand why this was still there, and I was filled with questions.

Zing!

At the same time as a tingling sensation throughout my body, a slight heat began to rise.

'T-this...'

I thought it was fixed, but it was still there?!

As the heat slowly began to rise, I let out a hot breath and hugged Evan even tighter.

It's hot.

My whole body was hot, and my senses seemed to be heightened.

But it wasn't a bad feeling.

It felt worse when I hugged Evan, but that's why I hugged him even tighter, trying to feel this sensation even more.

'I was going to take the lead...'

I wasn't confident in doing anything proactively since I wasn't used to this feeling yet.

"The curse... isn't it dangerous? We should fix it quickly..."

"[I don't want to...]"

I didn't want to.

I absolutely didn't want to.

I knew that this succubus curse wouldn't have any negative effects on my body or Evan anyway.

The goddess wasn't stupid, and if there was something that would cause me a big problem, there would be no reason to leave it behind.

In other words, the reason it was left behind was probably to help Evan and me love each other like this.

I didn't want to ruin this atmosphere because of something like this.

"Kuh..."

Was it the same for Evan?

Evan seemed to hesitate for a moment, but then said to me as if he couldn't take it anymore.

"Sorry, Aria! I can't take it anymore either...!"

"Ugh..."

Evan said that and then kissed me again.

"Haa... smooch... smooch...♡"

Continuing the deep kiss, Evan laid me down on the bed, contrary to before.

Reaching for my breasts, Evan roughly touched them, but at the same time, he carefully caressed them so they wouldn't hurt.

"Ugh... haa...♡"

He flicked my nipples with his fingers while groping between my legs with his other hand.

Since it was quite small compared to Evan, it didn't take long for his hand to reach the edge of my thighs.

Evan's touch was transmitted through my labia.

"Haa... haa..."

Evan, who had finished kissing and was now looking down at me, smiled and said.

"We've only been kissing, but you're already this wet? You're so soaked."

I was so embarrassed by Evan's appearance as he poked my panties with his finger that I quickly turned my head away.

'It's nice that he's teasing me while being considerate...'

But why?

It felt like it was missing something...

I felt like I wanted him to be a little more rough and violent.

'I'm a masochist...'

I couldn't help but feel like something was missing, even though I was in a good situation where I was being cared for, because I liked pain more than being treated like this.

But I couldn't tell him that I enjoyed pain.

No, that's not it.

We were both drunk right now, and I was under the succubus curse.

Since it wasn't fully known what kind of effect this would have, I could just say that the reason I felt better when he was rough was because of this.

From the moment I thought that, my thoughts were already telling Evan my inner feelings.

"[Please... be rougher...]"

"A-Aria...?"

With one hand caressing the mark on my stomach, and bringing the other to my mouth with a burning thirst.

I glanced at Evan with a wistful look and said that.

Even as he rubbed his wet fingers together, Evan's eyes widened at my thoughts.

He probably didn't expect me to say something like this.

I don't understand myself either.

I haven't done anything special, but I'm already so excited that I can't stand it, and my heart is pounding like it's about to explode.

I'm happy that I'm drunk, my whole body is hot, and I'm in this situation with Evan.

I didn't care about concepts or the personality I had originally set.

Quickly...

I was filled with the desire to have something thick mess me up inside.

Maybe that's why.

"H-huh... h-ha... haa..."

I gasped for breath and turned my body over, burying my face in the pillow.

Forcing my limp body up, I stuck my butt out to Evan.

Then, I grabbed my underwear and pulled it down.

I didn't care about the mood.

I just wanted him to fuck me like an animal.

"Fas... ter...♡"

Please... I wanted him to quench this burning thirst.

No pain was as bad as this moment.

It was painful.

I felt like I was going crazy.

"Kuh..."

Evan, who had been swallowing his moans as he looked down at my pussy that I had suddenly revealed, gritted his teeth.

The sight of it swollen red with only excitement, not intense touching.

My tightly closed pussy, already covered in fluids and smooth as if it was all ready, was reflected in Evan's eyes.

"Aria... you, you are..."

Evan mumbled with his head down, then roughly threw off all his clothes as if he couldn't take it anymore.

What was revealed between the clothes that fell to the floor was something huge, the size of an arm.

"Ah..."

The moment I saw it, my mind went blank.

'That's... a dick...?'

What about the dicks I knew?

What is it?

As I stared blankly at Evan's dick, Evan, who had already approached me, grabbed my butt tightly.

"H-huh...?!"

I moaned at the slight pain I felt in my butt as it was squeezed tightly, and I trembled.

"You... told me to be rough..."

"A-ah..."

Evan seemed to instinctively realize that there was no point in making excuses anymore, so he lifted his dick and brought it to my pussy.

Ah, ah...

No... w-wait a minute...

"[We should... shower...]"

Thwack!

"K-heeeck...?!"

I arched my back greatly at the sensation of his dick entering me deeply without warning.

It wouldn't be strange for an ordinary person to faint at that moment, but I was fully accepting that sensation as pleasure.

Pain as pleasure, and it was hard to endure the senses that had become even more sensitive due to the succubus queen's curse, rather than being painful.

"Ugh...♡"

Drip...

Unable to withstand the sensation of the huge, arm-sized dick filling my small pussy, I leaked on the spot.

"Kuh... ughhh...!"

Evan, who was looking down at me as if despising me, couldn't stand it and started shaking his hips roughly.

Was it because I had comforted him and given him harsh words while he had a guilty expression on his face until just now, and I had become so broken?

Or was it because the curse reminded him of bad memories?

I don't know why, but I didn't care.

One thing was certain,

'E-Evan...♡'

I wasn't normal right now.

And Evan had somehow fallen into the charm that was automatically cast by the curse.

Thwack! Thwack!

"Ugh, ugh... haa... heh...♡"

The price for not being able to overcome the burning sensation and the overflowing lust was high.

A pleasant sensation overflowed throughout my body, but I didn't have any room to spare.

I never imagined that I would experience a sensation like my stomach being pierced while having sex.

"S-save meee...♡"

I sensed that tonight was the biggest crisis of my life.

5 - After Party

"Ugh… Keuh… Heuh… Ugh… Ah…"

There was no more conversation between them.

It was a feat just to endure Evan's cock, which was pounding as if trying to lift her body.

Luxury was a waste.

Thwack! Thwack!

"Haa…! Haa…!"

The sound of their genitals colliding, soaked in Aria's fluids, echoed in the room.

Urine and fluids gushing from her vagina soaked the bedsheets.

Evan didn't seem to have any leeway either.

Of course.

It wasn't like Evan had any experience.

And neither did Aria.

She wouldn't know how to please him, and all she could do in this situation was shake her hips wildly.

Of course, Evan was probably just shaking his hips to have sex, but with his monstrous size and the difference in their physiques, Aria couldn't help but feel like she was being hit with a hammer.

With that huge cock, shaking his hips roughly and pounding away, of course he wouldn't have any leeway.

"Ugh… Ugh… Oop…♡"

Every time Evan pushed his cock deep inside her, Aria felt an electric jolt of pleasure run through her body.

"Heeeuuuu…"

The intense pleasure felt like her brain was melting.

She barely managed to bury her face in the pillow to stifle the strange moans she was about to make, but the more she held back, the more labored her breathing became.

"Gaa… Gaaaa…"

Unlike Evan, who hadn't climaxed even once yet, Aria was climaxing so many times she couldn't keep count.

No, it was pointless to count.

Aria was climaxing little by little with each thrust from Evan, spraying fluids like a fountain.

'Die… Dieee…'

It wasn't pleasure gained from pain.

It was closer to mental satisfaction and happiness, so it was a bit far from purely physical pleasure.

But now it was different.

The curse that made her more sensitive and less sensitive to pain, making her horny.

Evan, who had completely fallen for the curse that continuously cast charm magic on the person who loved her, was ravaging Aria, whom he loved so much, like an animal.

Aria's well-being was the least of Evan's concerns right now.

Thwack! Thwack!

"Keck… Keuh… Hack… Haa… Heueuk…"

She had to get away.

If she didn't, she would die.

Aria instinctively felt that, but Evan wouldn't let her escape.

"Heok… Heok… Can't… Escape…"

Evan realized that Aria was trying to escape, but instead of stopping, he restrained her wrists.

"Heueh…?"

"Not… Satisfied yet… Just a little more…"

Evan muttered, grabbed both her wrists, pinned them to the bed, lifted his body, and began to pound her from above, as if slamming down.

Thud! Thud!

"Keok, Keck… Keuh…"

As he slammed down with weight, so violently that the bed creaked, Aria let out a breath, her voice sounding precarious, as if she was about to lose consciousness.

The pleasure that burned her brain, the pressure she felt all over her body, and even the pain that turned into pleasure, were too much to bear.

How many minutes had passed as she gasped for breath with half-glazed eyes?

"Kreeueuk… Heok… Heok…!"

Thwack! Thwack! Thwack!

Evan's hip movements became even faster than before.

He was now pressing down with his full weight, making it difficult to even come to her senses from the pressure.

In the chaotic situation, Aria sensed it.

The intuition that this act would soon end, that a thick, vibrant fluid would fill her inside.

"Ah… Ahne… Neeeuuun…"

Aria's words, squeezed out with difficulty, didn't last long.

"Aria…!! I'm sorry! Coming!! Kreeueuk…!!!"

While apologizing to Aria, he reached out and hugged her tightly from behind, pulling her towards him,

"Oop…"

And kissed her.

With his arms wrapped tightly around her, fondling her breasts, and his waist pressed against Aria's arched back.

"Hoo-oop…?!"

The two reached their climax at the same time.

Beuryut, Beuryuryut…

Evan's cock seemed to throb, then spurted out semen in time with the pulsations.

She could feel an amount that was hard to believe for a human filling her belly.

Evan's cock, clearly imprinted on Aria's abdomen, twitched, filling her vagina with baby batter.

"Euk… Haa… Haa…!"

Only after cumming inside her did Evan regain his senses and pull his cock out, which had been pounding as if it would pierce her abdomen.

Pop, trickle…

As soon as Evan pulled out his cock, the sound of air escaping from her open vagina could be heard, and thick, milky fluid flowed out of her vagina.

"Heck… Heeek…"

Aria buried her face in the pillow, limp as a spent dog.

She was lying on her stomach with her legs spread, exposing her vagina and anus, but Aria, who had already lost half her mind, didn't care.

"Haa… Haa…"

Evan, who had finally regained his sanity after cumming inside Aria, froze again as soon as he saw the scene before him.

"Ah…"

Aria's figure, lying on the bed with her legs spread.

The sight of the large amount of white fluid he had just released inside her flowing out of her open vagina.

'Why… did I do this…?'

Evan wondered.

It had been difficult to stay sane ever since the vulva appeared on Aria's belly.

After she finally threw off her underwear and seduced him, he lost his mind and went berserk to the point where he couldn't even remember properly.

"Euk…"

Only then did Evan belatedly realize what he had done, but it was already far too late.

Rather, from the moment he saw the girl he loved and cherished so much, Aria, exposing her genitals and spilling his seed, Evan felt his cock stiffen.

Especially since he had cherished Aria for a long time… even regressing through the necklace to save Aria with a wish.

The moment he saw her ruined by his own hands, he couldn't help but get uncontrollably excited.

"Ha, haha…"

Evan, staring down at his throbbing cock, let out a hollow laugh.

Was it true that even a hero was just a person after all?

His wavering eyes began to calm down little by little.

'Now… I don't care anymore.'

Evan had never engaged in any significant sexual activity in his life.

He had been afraid since he could think, and after drawing the Holy Sword, he had become even more focused on the sword.

He had received proper sex education, so he was well aware of what he was doing now.

But wasn't it said that belated wandering was an even sweeter fruit?

For Evan, having sex with Aria was not the kind of thing that even his transcendent patience could endure.

"You definitely… said it was okay…"

She even asked him to be rougher.

Thinking that, he looked at Aria.

Aria's figure, still out of her mind, exposing her buttocks and twitching her vagina.

Evan was certain that it was she who had asked him to be rough, even though she was half-passed out now.

And he still remembered.

Then wasn't there no more problem?

The moment that thought reached him, Evan approached Aria again, grabbed his cock, and brought it to her buttocks.

He brought his cock, covered in fluids and semen, to her vagina, which was twitching as if begging to be pounded again.

Holding her buttocks, Evan hesitated whether to insert it or not, rubbing his cock against her vagina, but soon he finished his contemplation.

"I'll apologize later."

It was already the limit.

Her vagina, which had been tightly closed when he first exposed it, had long since been transformed into the shape of a cock by him until just now.

Besides, he had injected so much baby batter inside that it was overflowing, so it wouldn't make a difference if he did it a few more times since he had

already done it once.

Pooh-ook

"Eue, aheueeut…?"

Thinking that, Evan pushed his cock in.

Then, a bit of life returned to her glazed eyes, and Aria let out a questioning moan.

Unlike before, when it had been a bit tight, she now allowed his cock to invade so easily.

"Ah…"

Repeating the process of pulling out and inserting his cock, which had gone in deeply to the root, Evan began the act again.

It was already impossible to escape.

Aria sensed it.

The sex monster might not have been her, but perhaps Evan.

That day, Aria repeatedly fainted and woke up countless times.

Even the next morning, even at noon.

The act continued.

If Stella hadn't noticed something was wrong and come to find them, Aria might have died once from exhaustion…

6 - After Party

The next day.

Stella woke up in the morning, savoring the rich aroma of tea and smiling.

"Haa..."

No matter how she thought about it, she was so cool yesterday.

She was intoxicated by her own coolness.

'Grasping the atmosphere and teleporting at incredible speed...'

Instead of chanting an ugly spell and teleporting, she disappeared after saying, "Well then, goodbye," with pre-memorized magic.

The more she thought about it, the more she thought she was crazy at that moment.

'This is what a grand space magician is...'

Well, technically, a future grand magician.

Her teacher, Archen, said that she would reach the level of grand magician before long.

At this point, wouldn't it be okay to just call her a grand magician?

"Kyaa... I'm getting drunk..."

"Uung... Stella?"

"Oh, you're awake?"

"Hua..."

Yuriel, who had woken up, stretched and walked straight to Stella, sitting down in a chair.

"Why did you suddenly use teleport yesterday...?"

"Ah. Um... that...?"

Stella pondered.

She knew about the relationship between men and women, and the acts that take place between them, so she had left them alone, but Yuriel was different.

It was only natural that she should have received sex education, but the Emperor cherished his daughter, especially the pure and innocent Yuriel...

'She doesn't know anything...'

She really doesn't know anything.

She doesn't know how to have children, or what kind of acts are involved... so she has no way to explain it to her.

However, she couldn't just ignore Yuriel, who was asking her for an explanation.

After a moment of consideration, Stella closed her eyes.

In times like these, a head-on approach was the answer.

"Actually, Aria and Evan are dating. So I just left them alone. To give them some time together."

"..."

Did it work?

Stella slightly opened her eyes and looked at Yuriel.

Yuriel looked genuinely surprised, covering her mouth with her hand and widening her eyes.

"R-Really...?!"

"... Uh-huh..."

"Oh no... I didn't even know..."

"..."

Is she teasing me?

She briefly thought so, but quickly dismissed the idea.

Yuriel wouldn't pretend not to know in order to tease her; she wasn't the type to think so high-level to tease others.

She was probably just genuinely reacting that way because she didn't know.

'At this rate, I can't get praised for my praiseworthy actions...'

I can't even brag about it.

She actually wanted to be praised for memorizing and using teleportation so well, but if she told Archen about it, she would only be told to work harder.

That was her only complaint.

She just wanted to be praised.

'Sigh... never mind...'

What's the point of getting praised for something like this?

She would just pass the time here.

Anyway, before leaving, she had left a note saying that they would be in Yuriel's room, so come and see them when they were done.

This was also a consideration.

She thought it would be better to let them finish their business before coming to see them, in case something else happened in the meantime.

As expected, I'm the best.

Stella thought to herself, hoping that Aria would be happy.

She took another sip of tea.

.

.

.

'Something's wrong.'

How much time had passed since then?

It was past noon, and the sun was starting to set, but there was no sign of them coming.

Usually, even if they had been at it all night, they would have woken up and come to see her by now.

No matter how long she waited, they didn't come, so she started to worry.

'Should I go check on them...?'

The problem was if they were still doing it, or if they had already finished and were still sleeping.

Considering that, it was better not to go, but she couldn't help but worry.

'The note hasn't been opened either...'

It was placed in a clearly visible spot, so they couldn't have missed it.

That meant there was a reason why they couldn't see it.

The most likely reason was that they were still sleeping...

'How much did they do it...?!'

Did they really do it all night?

Or did they get drunk and fall asleep for a long time?

Honestly, Stella couldn't believe that Aria would do such a thing.

She had left them alone yesterday not to encourage them to do it, but to give them some time together.

Of course, they would do it if they wanted to, but would those two, who had been showing each other innocent affection until recently, really do such a thing?

Moreover, Aria, who had no sexual experience, and the brave but kind fool who only knew about swords, loved each other...

Stella thought that if she didn't tell them directly, they might be confused about what to do.

Still, she thought it was polite to leave them alone, so she did...

'It's making me worry if it takes this long...!'

She couldn't help but worry.

This won't do...!

"Yuriel! Hand!"

"Y-Yes?"

For a moment, Yuriel made a strange expression, thinking of what she did to dogs, but she realized the seriousness of Stella's expression and silently

placed her hand on Stella's hand.

Stella, confirming that Yuriel's hand was on hers, immediately used teleportation magic to return to her dormitory.

In an instant, the scenery twisted, and Stella, arriving in front of the dormitory door, wiped away the cold sweat and looked inside.

'I can't hear any voices...'

It doesn't sound like they're talking.

But it doesn't sound like anything else is happening either...

'Checking inside might be a good idea, but...'

What if they're doing something private? That would be embarrassing for them.

"Hey guys? Are you there?"

Thinking so, Stella quietly knocked on the door to see if they were inside.

However...

"... What?"

After knocking several times without getting an answer, Stella, who was starting to feel uneasy, decided that privacy didn't matter anymore and used magic to seize the space.

The magic power that rushed inside in an instant roughly showed the internal structure.

Soon, the forms of humans presumed to be Aria and Evan were revealed.

But why?

'Aria...?Aria was lying sprawled out in a large "D" shape.

And Evan was lying next to her.

Realizing that something unusual had happened, Stella gritted her teeth and shouted.

"Yuriel! Call the knights, quickly!"

"Y-Yes!"

While Yuriel went to call the knights,

"I'm going in?!"

Stella gathered her magic power to break down the door and go inside.

What should she do if something happened?

While thinking that to herself, Stella, more worried about them, hurriedly broke down the door and went inside.

Finally,

Crash!

The door shattered, and Stella, walking through the thick smoke, narrowed her eyes and looked around the room.

However.

"... What...?"

Sniff sniff,

Why does it smell so strange...?

Tilting her head and looking around,

What came into Stella's eyes was...

"...!!!"

Aria, naked... in a state that was hard to describe.

And Evan, lying next to her.

'What the hell,'

Stella blushed as she saw the large shadow between Evan's legs, but then cold sweat ran down her face as she saw Aria's appearance.

Looking at this, there was no way she couldn't know what had happened in this room.

'Ah...'

Now Stella realized.

What she had done.

'Ah, no!'

She had naturally thought that something had happened and told Yuriel to call the knights, but if she called them in this state, it would be an accident.

No, it's not just an accident.

It's beyond an accident, it's just...!

'Evan, you crazy bastard...!'

How violently did he treat Aria to end up in this state?

"You guys... you're dead when you wake up..."

Stella pointed her finger at Aria and Evan, who were covered in white, sticky liquid, gritted her teeth, and used teleportation.

After the two disappeared, and after using the clean magic she had learned from Archen throughout the room,

"They're over there! Something terrible happened to Evan and Aria...!"

Yuriel's voice.

"I'm sorry...!"

Stella, who didn't have the confidence to explain this situation, apologized to Yuriel and disappeared with teleportation magic.

Immediately after she disappeared, Yuriel arrived in the room...

"... Huh?"

Yuriel tilted her head at the restored room, the disappeared Evan and Aria... and Stella's appearance.

"What is it...?"

The knights who came with her also had bewildered expressions.

It was truly... a ghostly affair.

After Party (Intermission)

"I committed a sin worthy of death...!!"

Some time passed after that,

Evan woke up and immediately bowed his head, apologizing profusely.

'I need to apologize to Stella, even if I don't need to apologize to anyone else...'

Of course, one could argue that it wouldn't have been a problem if Stella hadn't found us, but if it weren't for Stella, who knows how long we would have been unconscious...

If someone had opened the door and walked in while we were passed out like that, it would have been a disaster.

The fact that Stella was the first one to come in was truly fortunate.

"..."

"What are you going to do? I thought something had happened to you guys and was about to have Uriel call the knights... The room was such a mess that I cast a Cleanse spell and ran away."

Stella said, her face flushed red.

At first, I thought she was angry when I saw her face, but she seemed confused, as if the scene she had just witnessed was replaying in her mind.

What am I going to do...

Honestly, I don't know what to do either.

This is a first for me too.

'Honestly... it's true that I couldn't resist my desires and got carried away...'

But I think it couldn't be helped.

Who would have known that the curse on me would be triggered at that moment?

'Why didn't she remove the curse...?'

Isn't she a goddess who granted my wish by creating an even more unbelievable miracle than removing the curse?

I didn't specifically ask her to remove the curse in my wish, but considering that the one who cast the curse was the Succubus Queen, she should have removed it.

But instead of removing it, she chose to leave the curse as it was, so I couldn't help but wonder.

'Ugh...'

I can't even look Stella in the eye, let alone Evan.

After all, that means Stella saw me passed out after being completely ravaged...

"I have nothing to say..."

"Of course you shouldn't. Well... it's a little strange of me to ask why it happened now, after I left you two alone to spend time together..."

Stella frowned, struggling to find the right words.

No, it's not strange.

"[...No, I'm grateful... I wouldn't have woken up if it weren't for Stella...]"

I was so exhausted from doing it all night that I just fell asleep.

It's a strange thing.

When the Authority is activated, even if my limbs are blown off and my body is torn apart, it regenerates immediately, and I'm not even that tired.

Well, if the Authority was activated just by having sex, that would be a problem in itself.

"Oh, really? I'm glad you think so..."

Stella sighed deeply, saying that the situation was getting complicated, and demanded an explanation of what happened.

What else can I do?

She's seen everything, so I hope that Stella will at least know that Evan and I aren't perverts, with a mix of truth and lies.

Of course, I can't say that I didn't have such thoughts at all, so what I'm saying now isn't entirely true, but I hope I can at least leave her with the impression that it was unavoidable because of the curse.

That's all I needed...

Really...

"Hmm... I see..."

Stella looked at me with a strange expression.

More precisely, at my abdomen.

I reflexively covered my abdomen with both hands, and Stella's face turned red again.

"I-It's okay... I'll pretend I didn't see anything today... You don't have to worry about me telling anyone else about this."

"[...Thank you...]"

"It's okay... I've had trouble with the Succubus Queen's curse before... I didn't expect Evan to be completely seduced by her charm."

"[The Succubus's charm relies on willpower as much as mental strength...]"

The conclusion was that I wasn't putting up a mental barrier, so I was completely overcome by the curse's charm, and Evan roughly attacked me... That's the conclusion.

There was no other way to explain why Evan went berserk at that time...

"So that's why..."

Evan also said that he felt something was wrong with himself at that time, and that it felt really strange when he thought about it now, so it seems like this is the right answer.

"Um... well, you know."

Stella said, twisting her hair shyly.

"You said you did it really intensely...?"

"[...Y-Yes...]"

No, it's even more embarrassing when you react like that...

I wondered why I was having this conversation with Stella and turned my head slightly as I answered, and Stella continued.

"Th-Then... maybe... a baby..."

"[...Huh?]"

"I mean, your stomach looks swollen enough inside... Ah, geez, what am I saying...! So!"

Stella raised her hand.

"C-Can I check for you?"

"[What are you talking about...?]"

"If you're pregnant... I mean..."

"[Y-Y-YES?!]"

I really didn't expect that, damn it.

"Ugh, I knew you'd react like that...!"

I was gaping because I didn't expect her to bring it up so suddenly, and she made a regretful face, saying that she knew I'd react like that.

Then she sighed.

"I-I'd be happy to, but why would you do that for me...?"

I was speechless when I heard Evan's answer.

I'm the one getting checked, so why are you happy...?

"Um... it's hard to say this, but how long has it been since Aria's body came back?"

"Hasn't it been about two weeks...?"

Stella's face turned pale at Evan's answer, and she approached me and put her mouth to my ear.

And,

"Did you... have your period?"

"[...??]"

I widened my eyes at the shocking word coming from Stella's mouth.

M-My period...?

"Of course, the cycle is different for everyone... But the goddess said that all your physical functions are back to normal now, unless you were blessed and your body became healthy, right?"

"[Yes... Uh...]"

"Then... by now..."

Ah.

Come to think of it.

I haven't had my period since my body changed.

My body's growth has stopped, but my body is the same age as Stella and Evan.

Could it be.

"[C-Check...]"

"I've never done it before, so I don't know if it'll work..."

Stella put her hand on my stomach with a slightly serious expression and sent magic power into it.

Stella looked worried that she might make a mistake, but unlike her anxious heart, the magic power flowed smoothly into my abdomen and settled there.

And,

"..."

Stella's words began to disappear little by little.

There was a way to find out if someone was pregnant in this world.

Of course, it's not something that commoners can do, but nobles call a wizard to check.

Wizards can send magic power into the mother's body and check if the life inside resonates with the magic power.

Of course, as someone who uses divine power, I can feel the magic power flowing in, but I have no way of knowing what it's doing.

I waited for Stella to finish checking and looked at Evan.

He was slamming his forehead on the floor again as soon as I looked at him, so he seemed to know how crazy what he did to me yesterday was.

Men are such sad creatures...

Evan didn't remember exactly what he did last night, although he clearly had pleasant sensations, so I felt even more sorry for him.

'I felt good though...'

Of course, I was the one who cast the charm, so I was just horny, but I can say that my mind was relatively fine.

The problem is that I passed out as soon as the first act was over, so I don't remember the rest very well.

Looking at this, we're both the same.

I felt good too...

'I'll have to pick him up and hug him when the check is over.'

He must be having a hard time mentally too.

He cherishes me so much, but he ended up treating me roughly like a hypocrite.

As I was thinking and waiting.

Stella's expression was stiff after she finished checking.

'Could it be.'

No way, right?

I swallowed hard and called Stella.

"Um... Aria?"

"[Yes?]"

"Take a deep breath... and listen carefully."

Ah.

Oh no.

"You're... pregnant..."

"..."

Wow.

Hearing those words, I approached Evan.

And,

Thwack!

I unknowingly flicked Evan's forehead.

"Gasp."

"Ugh..."

Stella was surprised and Evan was horrified.

That's right.

I became a mother.

With my first experience.

What the hell.

1 - Marriage

I'm pregnant.

There was a minor incident where I accidentally whacked Evan over the head as soon as I found out, but Evan said he was okay, so I guess that's that?

Evan said it was his fault anyway, so he'd accept any punishment...

'Was it really Evan's fault?'

That's what I thought.

It wasn't just Evan's fault, and I was just as caught up in the moment, so I didn't think I had any right to be angry.

It's just that, even though I knew about him, the fact that I'm pregnant now doesn't change.

It's been quite a while since I've been in this body... and we were going at it pretty hard... but it's hard to believe that I got pregnant right away after only doing it once.

'Am I just easy to get pregnant, or is Evan amazing...'

Maybe it's both.

Stella said it was just incredibly good timing, and the fact that he filled me up with so much sperm at that exact moment made it a wonder I didn't get pregnant sooner.

Anyway!

Denying reality wasn't going to change the fact that I was pregnant, so I looked up all sorts of things about what to do... and since there was

someone I needed to tell first, we've been incredibly busy ever since that day.

'To be getting married this fast...'

Now I'm even planning a wedding...

Apparently, in this world, it's frowned upon to have a child before getting married... so since I got pregnant with a shotgun wedding, it's only right to get married before giving birth.

Stella said, "The hero who defeated the Demon King and the Saintess got married, had a child, and lived happily ever after. Isn't that just like a fairy tale?"

Considering everything I've been through so far, I think "grim fairy tale" is a more fitting description.

Anyway... because of how things turned out, Evan, who thought he had defeated the final, ultimate boss, suddenly had to face the real final boss... the one no one expected.

"..."

Evan was sweating as he looked up at the woman in front of him.

She was so beautiful that it felt like radiant golden light was emanating from her entire body, and she was looking down at Evan with an indifferent expression.

"Hero, Evan."

"Yes..."

Of course, it was Aselina.

"Any excuses?"

Evan lowered his head and earnestly said to Aselina,

"... Please give me your daughter."

"GAAAAAH!"

At the same time, divine power exploded, sending the table flying and hitting Evan directly.

The table, flying at an incredible speed, should have hurt when it hit him, but Evan didn't budge an inch and remained seated, facing Aselina.

Even with the tremendous divine power being emitted, Evan was confident.

'Wow...'

It's a battle between the strongest in the world...

Of course, I'm happier that he's standing up and taking responsibility rather than cowering and apologizing... and it's true that Evan looks cooler...

But still, isn't he being a little too confident?

Of course, as I said before, I give him more points for showing such confidence?!

Isn't this like the sky falling for Aselina...?

"Ahem..."

How long had they been staring at each other like that? Just as I was starting to feel stuffy and was about to tell Aselina that it was really okay...

The divine power that had been pressing down on the surroundings gradually subsided.

In the meantime, Evan already possessed more power than Aselina, so he was completely unfazed by the tremendous divine power being emitted.

Soon, the divine power completely disappeared, and Aselina, who had been staring at Evan, sighed deeply.

"Actually... from the first time I saw you, I thought you were the only one who could make Aria happy."

What's the point of saying that now after acting like that earlier?

As soon as she said that, Evan's expression changed to a bright one.

"Does that mean...!"

"Even so, it was too fast! How long has it been since you came back, and you not only did the deed, but... to get her pregnant with a child...!"

Aselina shouted with a face so red it looked like she was about to explode, then turned to look at me.

"A, Aria, could it be that... like that... boo-hoo..."

"..."

No.

Where did the attitude she had earlier go...?

Aselina seemed incredibly sad, as if she couldn't believe that the pure me had not only had relations with Evan but had also gotten pregnant right away.

No... maybe she's not reacting like that just because I'm pregnant.

It's hard to say this to Aselina, but... maybe she's reacting like that because I'm faster than her...

'Ahem!'

If I said that, I'd become A/ria that day, so I decided to keep my mouth shut.

Even though I have an immortal body, I'm not a demon, and I don't want that to happen to Aselina, who saved me when I was about to die.

Even if I like pain, I know my limits...

That's because the sadness of being treated like that by someone I trusted would be greater than the visceral pleasure that comes from pain...

Probably...

"Honestly, kids these days are all so indecent! Really indecent!"

"Lady Aselina..."

Evan couldn't bear to see Aselina breaking down any further, so he averted his eyes.

"Haa..."

Aselina, shuddering at Evan's reaction, sighed deeply.

Then she continued,

"Anyway, the situation has already happened... and it seems like you're determined to take responsibility..."

"Lady Aselina...?"

"I'll allow it. I don't think it's my place to allow it in the first place... or rather, I brought her here, so is it right for me to take care of it?"

Aselina looked at me with a wistful expression.

"Aria, are you satisfied with this?"

"[... Yes. I can't refuse a man who was willing to... give his life for me.]"

"Hehe... that's right. Evan is a good enough husband."

Evan looked like he was about to ask what she meant by that, but since it was a compliment, he couldn't bring himself to say anything and just turned his head away, secretly suppressing his embarrassment.

"Ahem... then now..."

Aselina glanced down at Evan.

"I have something to talk about with Aria for a moment, so would you mind leaving?"

"Something to talk about...?"

"It's important."

Evan's expression became serious as she said that with a serious expression, and he nodded and immediately left the room.

'A serious conversation... was there something to talk about...?'

If there was something to talk about, she would have said it a long time ago, so I couldn't help but wonder...

As soon as Evan left, Aselina looked around again to make sure he wasn't nearby, and after confirming that Evan wasn't around, she sighed and called me over to the sofa.

"[Lady Aselina...?]"

"Come here, Aria."

"[Yes...]"

I sat on the sofa and kept looking at Aselina, wondering what she was going to talk about. Ahem, she cleared her throat and...

Was looking around again.

'What's she trying to say that she's taking so long...?'

Is it something that she has to be so careful about?

At this point, I was starting to dread getting asked the question.

"A, Aria?"

"[Yes.]"

"Um... don't be surprised... ah... w, well, you don't have to answer if it's hard for you to answer. I'm just asking out of curiosity... so please don't feel pressured."

"[...???]"

Didn't she just say that Evan shouldn't hear it because it was an important conversation?

I felt like my brain short-circuited for a moment when she suddenly said that.

Aselina sighed again as I was stuttering, set the mood, and made eye contact with me.

After staring into my eyes for a long time, Aselina carefully opened her mouth.

With the words,

"How was... your night with Evan...?"

Words that made me doubt my ears.

Because they came from Aselina's mouth.

"[... Huh?]"

"Ah, that's not because I'm curious... I heard that humans are happy when the man is good in bed... so, could you tell me a little about how it was...?"

"..."

I wondered what she was going to talk about.

Aselina...

That Aselina...

Would ask me something like this.

I really...

Really didn't imagine it.

I laughed softly.

'But she's asking me to...'

Honestly, I don't think I can stand it either.

I guess it's because something like that happened...

I hesitated for a moment, wondering where to start, and then opened my mouth.

And so, I began to explain what happened that night.

Aselina listened with bated breath and shining eyes.

From beginning to end, with incredible concentration.

2 - Marriage

After that, things progressed smoothly.

Aselina had given her permission, and the people of the Holy Kingdom already considered my marriage to Evan a foregone conclusion.

Even within the Knights, everyone knew that Evan and I were... well, you know.

Or rather, they were mostly speculating that we were, but since most of them thought so and their belief was unwavering, it was more like they firmly believed it.

Many of the Knights seemed to think that Evan felt sorry for me after seeing me constantly sacrificing myself, and that he made tremendous efforts to help me in any way he could, and finally saved me by subduing the Demon King.

'That's kind of true...'

I knew that it was a typical knight or hero story straight out of a fairy tale, so it was bound to appeal to people.

And that it was a story that would ignite the hearts of both men and women.

As for me, the person involved, most of those sacrifices were things I did because I wanted to, and I wasn't suffering while sacrificing myself back then, but rather feeling pure pleasure and laughing "hehe"...

I couldn't just accept it that way, so I often felt burdened by the Knights and priests who thought of Evan and me that way and cheered us on.

And now, they were expecting us to be a sweet couple who were dating but didn't know what to do, just holding hands and trembling.

I wonder if the people of the Holy Kingdom know that not long after Evan and I started dating, I had my first time, and it was such an intense night that it was hard to believe it was my first time...

I can guarantee that only Stella and Aselina know about that.

And only those two will ever know...

I received a confidentiality agreement.

Aselina was especially ridiculous.

'She really doesn't have any experience...'

As soon as I saw how focused she was on my story, I thought, "Ah, this dragon... she has no experience at all..." And then she screamed "Kyaa!" genuinely after hearing my story...

I ended up explaining things with very explicit words, since it wouldn't do if she knew the sexual terms too well.

For example, Evan's... uh... um... well, I talked about it using the word that young children mainly use... and like... that...

'How did I explain it...'

I shouldn't have done that.

I regret it.

I smacked my forehead.

I'm an idiot...

I don't think I can face Aselina for a while...

Hmm...

"Oh, aren't you the Holy Maiden?"

"[H-Hot...!]”

That voice was Danas's voice.

The moment I recognized it was Danas, I tried to run away right away, even before I could properly see him...

"Congratulations on your marriage!"

"[Ah, hahaha... Thank you...]"

I couldn't bring myself to run away at his words, said with a bright smile as soon as he met my eyes, so I answered with an awkward smile.

Of all places, to meet Danas here.

I had a very deep relationship with Danas, to the point where he was even my personal guard...

Danas was a rather monumental figure for me.

'Because he's the first person I saved by risking my life.'

Years ago, when I was still working as a nun before becoming the Holy Maiden.

I still vividly remember saving Danas, who was dying, by giving up my entire life.

That was the first time I felt the sensation of dying.

So, from Danas's point of view, wouldn't he think of me as the Holy Maiden he has to serve for the rest of his life?

He might be upset that I didn't tell him that I was getting married to Evan, even though he wasn't showing it outwardly.

"As long as the Holy Maiden lives happily... I'm satisfied with that. Haha."

"[Hahaha...]"

"But you know."

Crack.

I felt like Danas's smiling expression was slightly distorted...

"Could I... meet the Hero just once?"

"[Y-Yes...?]"

"I won't do anything. In the first place, there's no way someone like me could do anything to someone who's strong enough to subdue the Demon King."

"[Y-Yeah...]"

"But... there's something I absolutely have to talk about as man to man."

"[Ah...]"

Man to man.

What are you planning to talk about?

Danas is already married, so maybe he's trying to give him some tips on married life.

Why is it that I feel a strange murderous aura from Danas's expression?

What is this anxiety that makes me feel like an ordinary conversation will never take place?

One thing was certain: I shouldn't let Danas, who was currently boiling with emotion, meet Evan.

Of course, it wasn't like Evan would be killed by Danas, or Evan would kill Danas, or anything like that.

But it was certain that something huge would happen.

"[Ahem... I'm in the middle of an important conversation with Aselina right now... And there are many other important things to do, so I don't think he'll be able to make time for it anytime soon.]"

"Ah... that's a shame."

What's a shame, you crazy bastard.

Anyway...

Danas looked at me with a serious expression and asked.

"Holy Maiden, are you happy with this?"

"[Happy... you say.]"

Happy.

Honestly, I don't know yet.

I feel like I've lost my purpose itself... I feel a bit empty... and I wonder if my choice to live in this world was the right one.

But you know.

"[I've already made my choice. Finding happiness in this life is also... I think it's a way to repay the goddess who believed in me and whom I believed in.]"

That much was sincere.

I was going to find happiness one by one while living with Evan.

Danas's expression softened at my answer, and he smiled and said.

"That's... enough. I hope you have a good love."

I smiled in response.

"Congratulations on your marriage."

As soon as he heard our news, Argen rushed over to congratulate us.

It felt strange that the Dean of the Academy, of all people, was visiting us to offer his congratulations.

Of course, Argen's relationship with us wasn't bad, and in fact, it was good since we had essentially become members of the same Hero party and subdued the Demon King.

"Valencia said she'll come to the wedding. She said it's a bit difficult to go back and come back again."

"[Hahaha...]"

I guess so...

She just finished subduing the Demon King... She was about to go back... She heard about Evan and me getting married.

Valencia must be dumbfounded.

Honestly, I was also feeling dazed because I didn't expect to have a wedding so quickly.

"Hmph..."

Argen looked at Evan and me intently, then smirked as if he understood something.

"You guys, did it?"

"...!!"

"..."

Evan was startled, and I was also embarrassed, although I didn't show it.

"H-How did you..."

Why are you admitting it?

Argen answered as if it was obvious when Evan asked in genuine surprise.

"If you're getting married this quickly, it can only be that... you're pregnant?"

"..."

"Originally, premarital pregnancy is illegal under imperial law."

Evan's face turned pale at his chuckling words.

"I... I will definitely take responsibility. I will... make you happy forever..."

"Why are you telling me that? Are you stupid?"

"..."

He must be feeling quite guilty.

I would feel guilty too if I were him.

I thought we would have our first time in a somewhat romantic atmosphere, but I fell for the charm of the curse...

Um, I'll omit the rest.

I was horny and egged him on, but it's definitely Evan's fault for falling for it and acting like an animal.

"If you're going to say something, you should tell your wife, you moron."

Tsk tsk, Evan covered his face with both hands and lowered his head at his clicking tongue.

I hope he doesn't kill himself.

I'm starting to feel sorry too.

"[It's okay, Evan. I think that side of Evan is cool too.]"

When I gave Evan a bright smile and hugged him from behind, Evan muttered a small thank you.

Oh my, our Evan, you were upset.

As I stroked his head and patted him, Argen, who was watching from the side, wrapped his arms around himself and shivered.

"Eugh, so cheesy... It wasn't this bad before... I can't take it, I'm going first."

"[Yes? Wait a minute...]"

"You said you don't have much time left to prepare for the wedding, so let's meet again then."

Hey, how can you just say what you want and leave?

I stared blankly at Argen, who had disappeared in an instant.

It's not that I don't understand why he's reacting like that.

Maybe Argen also wanted to be on such good terms with the previous Hero...

Showing this kind of behavior in front of us is no different from doing something sorry to Argen again.

Even so, you shouldn't just leave...

Anyway... he was like a great mage.

He always lives the way he wants.

3 - Marriage

Was the idea that premarital pregnancy was illegal that shocking?

Actually, it seems like premarital relationships are done in secret, but pregnancy, more than anything, can't be erased, so from the moment it's revealed, it's just over...

That's why contraception needs to be certain.

'Ugh...'

Still, who knew I'd get pregnant from just doing it once?

The timing was incredibly perfect, and the amount Evan released inside me was beyond imagination, so it would have been strange not to get pregnant, but still.

Fortunately, there were many people around us who were willing to help, and even though we were still academy students, no one thought it was strange that we were getting married.

Seeing the academy students congratulate us while also being sad that they wouldn't be able to see us anymore makes me think I haven't lived my life wrong.

'I guess this is goodbye to the academy.'

After the wedding, Evan and I decided to drop out of the academy.

The reason I originally wanted to go to the academy disappeared anyway.

In my case, it was to find Evan, create a party, and defeat the Demon King... and to solve the various crises that occurred in the academy, and in Evan's case, it was to broaden his horizons according to his teacher's words.

In the end, I defeated the Demon King and solved all the crises.

Evan broadened his horizons to the point where he became stronger than anyone else in the world.

Evan had reached a level where he could even beat Valencia, who is said to be unmatched in this era with a sword, so who could teach Evan anything?

Of course, there are still many things to learn in the world, so you shouldn't stop learning, but for now, those aren't the kinds of things you can learn by staying in the academy.

So Evan and I were going to drop out and wander around the world... doing things we hadn't been able to do with Evan while gradually learning about language.

Language.

Speaking of language, that reminds me.

Damn it.

I've been so annoyed by this lately.

"At this rate, you'll master the common language soon, right?"

I was wrong to have hope after seeing Stella giggling and saying that...

Honestly, it wasn't that I lacked confidence.

I poured all my stats into faith, but after seeing me memorize the Bible in an instant, I started to think that maybe I wasn't so stupid and started a happy delusion.

Of course, that was nonsense.

The reason I was able to read and memorize the Bible so quickly was surprisingly because I had invested so much in faith stats, which had nothing to do with intelligence stats.

Well, isn't there such a case?

Even if you're an idiot, you can get absorbed in something you like.

Even if you think you're not smart, doesn't something like your favorite game or novel... come to mind right away?

At that point, you'll probably remember all the stat numbers of items in the game.

In other words, I have the highest level of faith stats, so I can show a genius-level appearance when it comes to things related to God, but language is related to intelligence.

For about a month, I studied the language hard while preparing for the wedding, but...

"Okay, repeat after me. Marry me."

"M-Marry... mee."

"Pwahahaha!"

Stella burst out laughing as if the sky was falling.

What the heck.

It's hard enough to follow along.

Especially in my case, I've hardly had a conversation out loud for over three years, so it's even more unfamiliar.

I've only spoken out loud once.

When I went into the Trial of Wisdom!

I don't even remember it anymore.

"It's a bit difficult to pronounce... It's like seeing myself when I was young~"

I hung my head at Yuriel's words with a smile.

"[I think this is more comfortable...]"

"No, no~ Are you going to talk telepathically at the wedding too? You're going to make an eternal vow with Evan soon."

"..."

Eternal vow.

It is one of the most important elements of a wedding in the Holy Kingdom, which exists only in the Holy Kingdom.

After declaring before God that you will only love the spouse in front of you and live for them for the rest of your life, you kiss each other as proof of that.

If you break that vow, God will punish you... that's the kind of culture they have.

They say you express your love for each other there... but in my case, I have to talk telepathically because I don't know the Imperial Common Language.

"At least you should be able to say 'I love you' properly."

"... I wuv you..."

"The pronunciation is a bit off? It's ambiguous."

"..."

Ugh!!

Why do I have to learn the language from the beginning!!

"I checked one last time, but I guess it's not going to work."

"The Imperial Common Language is difficult... It's amazing that you learned it in a month."

"... I did it in a day?"

"Eh..."

Yuriel looked blank.

Then she grabbed her head.

"Oh, uh... why...?"

It seems like it took Yuriel longer than me.

Judging from her reaction, it was almost certain...

"Evan must be preparing too... Aria, how about you?"

"[Huh? What do you mean?]"

"The wedding dress, does it suit you?"

Suits me well.

At those words, I looked in the mirror.

There, a beautiful girl with long, beautiful blonde hair that looked like it was embroidered with stars was facing me.

And the girl was wearing a pure white dress.

'I'm wearing a wedding dress...'

I've never worn girly clothes before...

No, it's not that I've never worn them, but those were only worn semi-voluntarily, so the feeling I'm feeling now is unfamiliar.

The fact that the feminine clothes I'm wearing voluntarily are a wedding dress is even more absurd.

If I hadn't gotten pregnant so quickly, I would have dated Evan and enjoyed this and that...

Still...

I stroked my stomach.

The feeling of conceiving a new life with Evan and my child was an indescribable joy.

I didn't think the day I would wear this would come so soon, but I could still be purely happy.

'Evan...'

When I first came to this world, I never imagined that I would marry Evan.

Who could have imagined it?

I, who had only vowed to defeat the Demon King and return home, not only chose to stay in this world...

But fell in love with the hero... and decided to spend the rest of my life together.

My original world... it's not that I didn't have any regrets, but it's amazing that I made this choice.

What's even more amazing is that I don't have any regrets about my original world even though I made this choice.

I don't regret it.

I still think I made the right choice.

Evan is the kind of person who cares about me so much... I probably wouldn't be able to find him even if I lived my whole life back in my original world.

He was that attractive.

"I'm jealous. I wish I was like you..."

While Stella was looking at me with a wistful expression, someone knocked on the door.

"Yes~"

"The wedding is about to begin!"

Stella answered, and a voice was heard saying that the wedding would begin soon.

Already?

It's been a while since I came here... but I can't shake the feeling that it's already time.

That probably means I'm nervous.

More than anything...

'I'm going to have to show him this soon...'

I couldn't help but feel that way because I was going to have to show him this.

I felt embarrassed again when I was about to show him.

But...

'I'm excited...'

While I was fidgeting, I was also looking forward to seeing how Evan would react when he saw me.

How much will he cherish me...

What does Evan... think of me?

He'll probably tell me I'm pretty as soon as he sees me.

He'll also whisper that I'm cute and that he loves me.

I never thought I would love a man this much, but since it's something I never expected, my emotions are even more overwhelming.

Having someone you want to love for the rest of your life is so happy.

"[I'll go out.]"

That's why I was able to take a step forward with courage.

Towards the place where my hero is waiting for me.

The Eternal Vow (Complete)

Evan sighed, anxiety gnawing at him.

'The wedding is soon...'

It was the pressure of the impending ceremony that weighed on him.

Of course, marrying Aria was something he had longed for, but he had made a grave mistake with her at a crucial moment.

Aria was still affected by the curse, and given the circumstances, anyone would have been susceptible to its allure, so she said she understood...

'Ugh...'

He didn't remember everything clearly, but the fragmented memories that surfaced reminded him of how harshly and roughly he had treated her.

The more he saw Aria, perfectly fine, loving him, and smiling, the more self-loathing he felt.

But...

'Get a grip...'

Evan slapped his cheeks with both hands.

It was true that he felt sorry for Aria, but she had ultimately accepted his apology for what had happened.

He had to live with the guilt, but he had to remember that dwelling on it and being awkward around Aria as his wife would only hurt her more.

He just needed to treat her well from now on.

'Right. Let's do our best...!'

Even Aselina, who he thought was the final boss, reluctantly agreed and actively helped him, giving him this last chance, this final gate to pass.

To successfully complete this wedding and properly convey his feelings to Aria.

That was the goal of this wedding.

.

.

.

"Hooray! Congratulations on the wedding!"

"Evan! Evan! Evan!"

"Whoo-hoo!!"

As Evan stepped onto the carpet, he looked around at the countless people sending him their blessings and was inwardly shocked.

He never imagined so many people would come to the wedding.

It was a public wedding, but it was also because the hero who saved the world was marrying Aria, who was treated like a saint in both the Empire and the Holy Kingdom.

"Tch..."

There were a few people who seemed suspiciously angry, but most of them were quickly dragged away by the knights or the Empire's citizens who were on standby.

- Please welcome the bride.

In the midst of the peaceful wedding ceremony, the officiant's voice calling for the bride drew everyone's attention to the entrance.

And walking out from that entrance was...

"Wow..."

"Beautiful..."

The onlookers gasped in admiration.

Aselina, dressed in formal attire, and a beautiful girl in a radiant wedding dress, arm in arm with Aselina, walked side by side.

Aselina's beauty was enough to overshadow anyone, but the girl was just as beautiful, captivating the onlookers with her unique charm.

'Wow...'

Evan stared, his mouth agape.

Aria was always beautiful, but seeing her so elaborately dressed up for the first time made her even more stunning.

Aria seemed incredibly embarrassed, but Evan was so mesmerized that he could only think she was beautiful, even as he saw her expression.

He couldn't see anyone else.

His gaze was solely focused on Aria, who was walking forward bravely, despite her embarrassment.

'Wow, this is insane.'

As soon as I entered the wedding hall, I was greeted by a sea of people.

Honestly, if I had just used my divine power to get a general sense of things without actually seeing and hearing everything, I wouldn't have been so

overwhelmed.

But how could anyone not be overwhelmed by this...?

'Weren't the people getting married embarrassed when they saw this...?'

I'm so embarrassed that I can't even make eye contact with anyone...

Especially since the dress I'm wearing is so...

I felt like I was going to lose my mind if I kept looking around, so I turned my head to look at Evan.

I thought it would be better to focus on him.

And the moment I met Evan's eyes,

'Wow...'

This guy is so handsome.

I knew Evan was incredibly good-looking even before I met him, but seeing him right before the wedding felt different.

It was like his looks got a bonus boost.

Maybe everyone feels that way when they're in the bride's position.

After all, grooms always think their brides look more beautiful than ever on their wedding day.

So, it's not just my imagination that Evan looks even more handsome.

It's only natural that he looks more handsome!

Of course, I didn't fall for Evan because of his looks or his masculine charm, but looks are still an important factor.

It's only natural to prefer a handsome person over someone who is fat and ugly.

What if Evan had been ugly and fat when he saved me and did all those things for me?

I still think things wouldn't have changed if Evan had continued to care for me, but I still don't want to imagine it.

Anyway, Evan finally reached me... and we looked at each other.

"Evan..."

At least I didn't mess up his name.

When I called out to Evan, he smiled and looked down at me.

"You're beautiful, Aria."

"Ooh!"

The spectators in the front row gasped when they heard us.

He's really saying these embarrassing things so confidently in front of everyone...

It's giving me cognitive dissonance.

I turned my head slightly, feeling embarrassed.

"You're already being lovey-dovey before the wedding even starts..."

Aselina said with a dumbfounded expression.

I honestly thought she would come as the Pope, but since she had already revealed her true form as a guardian dragon to everyone, she probably didn't think it was necessary to transform into the Pope.

Or maybe the Pope persona was just a fake identity she used to hide her true self from me, and she didn't want to celebrate my wedding in that guise, so she came in her original form.

...

I don't need to think about that now.

I prefer Aselina in her true form.

At Aselina's remark, Evan and I stopped talking and linked arms.

Then the wedding began.

The officiant, who I knew well since this was the Holy Kingdom, asked us the formal question of whether we would love each other for eternity.

'Why is the Cardinal officiating...?'

I wondered for a moment, but then I just accepted it.

It's my wedding, and I'm a saint, so... it's not impossible for the Cardinal to be here...

I should probably stop thinking that things are impossible.

Evan and I answered the question confidently, and finally, it was time for the eternal vow that would mark the end of the wedding.

"Please hold this cross together."

At those words, Evan and I placed our hands on the cross.

A light of divine power burst forth from the cross where our hands touched, enveloping us.

"...?!"

"There's no need to be alarmed. The Goddess Romania is watching over you. No one will hear your conversation."

At the Cardinal's words, I was certain.

I could directly feel Romania's divine power.

My slightly nervous heart relaxed, and I looked up at Evan.

"[Evan.]"

"Yeah?"

"[Honestly... I think it was too fast. And it was too much back then.]"

"..."

I really couldn't have imagined it.

I didn't expect to have a wedding as soon as I got back.

I was going to do it anyway, but I didn't have time to prepare myself.

I was so busy with everything that trying to have a wedding on top of it all was giving me a headache.

But...

"[But now that it's happened... you'll keep your promise, right?]"

I asked Evan with a bright smile.

Evan nodded without hesitation, his expression filled with determination.

"I will... I will make you happy."

"[It's an embarrassing thing to say... but I think that's what makes you so charming.]"

I smiled.

And then I opened my mouth.

I said the one phrase I had been diligently practicing.

The one phrase that Stella had made sure I knew perfectly.

"I love you, Evan."

At my declaration, Evan kissed me.

At the same time as the eternal vow was made, the divine power that had been surrounding us disappeared, and the cheers of the crowd filled the air.

"I love you too, Aria."

"Yeah...!"

And so, we finished our wedding.

I hope we can live happily ever after.

- End -